NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 458. *Price, Five Cents.*

A TRAGEDY OF THE SEA

OR NICK CARTER'S DESPERATE FIGHT

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

As it shot forward like an arrow from a bow, Nick struck out with his huge knife, and he succeeded in burying it to the hilt in the belly of the shark.

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A Tragedy of the Sea;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S DESPERATE FIGHT.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MILLIONS IN GOLD AND JEWELS.

Long, rather low in the water, with black hull and rakish masts and funnels, the steam yacht *Howrah* lay at anchor in the Erie Basin, South Brooklyn.

She was a beautiful craft, too; one which attracted the eyes of a yachtsman as certainly as a beautiful woman will draw the admiration of an artist.

But just now she was attracting something more than mere admiration, for gathered along the wharves and docks which lined the shore in that vicinity were many groups of men and boys, with here and there a sprinkling of women, all of whom gazed expectantly at the graceful vessel as if they momentarily expected to see some strange shape appear on her decks, or as if some phenomenon were about to occur which had been foretold to them.

Even the other craft anchored in the basin possessed their quota of curious ones, and the reason for all this furor about a seemingly deserted yacht in the harbor can best be explained by recounting a conversation which took place between two men, the owners respectively of a schooner which had just sailed into the basin for an anchorage, and a yawl that was preparing to get under weigh for a spin in the lower bay.

"Ahoy, there, Simmons!" cried the skipper of the schooner, as he rounded to at his buoy, and reached out with a boat hook to catch the tripper. "What's all the excitement about?"

"Hello, Clarke! How are you?" came the response. "Where have you been for a week past?"

"I'm just in from Southold. But I say, what's doing? What's the matter with those crazy duffers alongshore. What are they all rubbering about? Eh?"

"Oh! Why, it's that black-hulled steamer out there."

"What's the matter with her?"

"Nothing at all, only she has lost her owner, her master and her crew."

"Eh? What's that? I'm afraid that I don't understand."

"The whole bunch is in jail."

"In jail! Who are they?"

"You can search me, old man. The owner is an East Indian nabob—the rajah of something-or-other, I believe. He got busy the other day and killed a woman somewhere up on Washington Heights, and it seems that the whole bunch aboard his yacht were accessories before or after the fact, or something very like that. Anyhow, Nick Carter got after them, and you know what that means, I suppose."

"It usually means the finish, doesn't it?"

"Sure thing."

"Who's aboard of the yacht now?"

"The marshal has taken charge of her temporarily, until the United States district attorney and the corporation counsel and a few others determine what disposition to make of her. They think they have got themselves into a sort of a box about the affair."

"How is that?"

"Well, I don't know that I have got the thing exactly straight, but the report is that when they came to search the vessel after having taken charge of her, they found something over a million dollars in gold aboard of her, to say nothing of about twice as much more in the value of jewels and a lot of other truck of the same sort."

The man named Clarke uttered a low whistle of astonishment. Then, half to himself, but still in a tone that Simmons could hear quite distinctly, for the schooner and yawl were now swinging as closely together as safety would permit, he said:

"I wouldn't mind having a little truck of that sort for my own."

"Nor I," replied Simmons.

"Say," said Clarke, after a pause, "if these were only the days of the black flag and the skull and cross bones, what a chance that would be for a Morgan or a Capt. Kidd; eh, old man?"

"I—should—say—so!"

There was no further conversation between the two men at that precise time, but after about half an hour, Clarke climbed into the dinghey, which acted as the tender for his schooner, and pulled over to the yawl, where he climbed aboard.

"Come down into the cabin and swab out your larynx," was the greeting which Simmons gave him as they shook hands. "Did you have a good run through the Sound?"

"I didn't come that way. I came around outside."

"Eh? Did you? Fine voyage that way, isn't it? Say, that's rather a remarkable situation about the *Howrah*, isn't it?"

"Is that the name of the steamer? The *Howrah*?"

"Yes."

"Queer name, that."

"Rather. It's Hindustanee, or Choctaw—or something; and it means 'You can't catch me,' or 'I'm faster than you are,' or 'Go to the devil,' or something of that sort. There are so many versions of it that any one of them will do."

"Is that a fact about the million dollars in gold, and the jewels, and all that?"

"Sure thing."

"And the coppers don't know what to do with it, now they've got it, eh?"

"No; they are quite up a tree."

"Well, it's the first time that I ever heard of coppers being puzzled about a thing of that sort. Tell me the story."

"I have told you about all there is to tell. Briefly it is like this: There was a young woman by the name of Montague—as beautiful as a dream, I've been told—murdered in a house up on Washington Heights the other day. Day before yesterday, I think it was. She was half Hindu and half English, and was a forty-'leventh cousin to the rajah who stabbed her.

"It seems that he came all the way from his home in India to do the job, at that, and there is a rumor that he also had his eye on the great Orloff ruby, intending to blow up the establishment to get it and to take it back to his palace with him. I don't know the story about that, and it is only a rumor anyway.

"All the same, he murdered the girl, and Nick Carter nabbed him for it, after one of the greatest fights of his life, I'm told.

"There was a chap mixed up with the rajah by the name of Maitland Carruthers——"

"What!"

"What's the matter? Didn't I say it plainly enough?"

"Sure you did. You said Maitland Carruthers, didn't you?"

"That's what I said."

"Well, I know him, that's all, and you surprised me."

"Know him, eh? Well, I can't say that I approve of your friends, if all that is said about him is true."

"He's a slick article."

"So I should judge."

"Go ahead with the story, Simmons."

"This Maitland Carruthers was mixed up with the rajah somehow; came here from India with him, I believe, and in the fight that took place when the arrests were made, he fell to the lot of Nick Carter. Report has it that he is as strong and as quick and almost as good at a scrap as the detective himself."

"I haven't a doubt of it, since I know the man."

"Well, Nick and his three assistants, sent part of the crew to the hospital, and then did up the rest of the outfit to the queen's taste. After that they had the yacht on

their hands, and they didn't know what to do with it. Carter turned it over to the police, and the coppers in turn transferred it to the government authorities, and now there is a marshal in charge, and that marshal is almost crazy."

"Why?"

"Why? Heavens! I should think it was plain enough why! How would you like to be stationed aboard that craft with the knowledge that there is somewhere between two and three million dollars in gold and jewels aboard of her, and with the additional knowledge that every crook in New York—and doubtless in the whole country, too—is aware of the fact that it is there?"

"I should like nothing better," was the quiet reply.

"Well, I wouldn't take the job that marshal has got for a good deal. He's only got six men aboard of her to help him watch over the stuff, and——"

"Do you mean six besides himself?"

"Sure."

"That means seven all told, doesn't it?"

"Eh? It used to, when I went to school. The marshal thinks that he is up against it very hard. Seven men to guard a treasure like that, isn't much, and when you stop to think that he is responsible for the whole shooting match—well, I don't want the job."

"Who is the marshal? Do you know him?"

"Yes; Billy Quirk is the man."

"I wonder if he would let us go aboard and see the vessel. Do you think he would?"

"Let us go aboard? Man, you're crazy. Why, he wouldn't let St. Peter aboard. If you were to jump into your dinghey at this moment and row out to within a hundred feet of the *Howrah,* you'd see Billy mount to the bridge of the yacht, and he'd level a Winchester at your head and say:

" 'Keep off, there!' and I'll bet a cookey that you would keep off, too. He's got a way of saying such things that sort of carries conviction with it, you know."

"He's as careful as all that, is he?"

"Yes, he is."

"Night and day both, I suppose."

"Night as well as day. Say, I wouldn't take chances by going that close at night, for I honestly believe that he would shoot first and tell you to keep off afterward."

"I wonder where the gold and the other stuff is stored," said Clarke, in a musing tone, as if the thought about it had just occurred to him.

"That is just Billy's trouble," said Simmons, in reply. "If the gold and the jewels were in a safe that was built into the vessel—a steel safe, or, in fact, anything that was secure, he would not feel so bad about it; but the fact is that the entire stuff is contained in two chests made of wood; oak, I suppose, for I have not seen them; and the chests are in the stateroom where the rajah used to sleep."

"All the same, I don't exactly see what Quirk has got to be afraid of."

"Well, common sense would say that he had nothing to fear, but uncommon sense would suggest to a man in his situation that among the thousands of desperate crooks in the city there might be a few—say a dozen or so—who would not hesitate to band together to assimilate that boodle. He can have his job; I don't want it."

"Isn't it rather strange that he was given a larger guard?"

"He didn't want any more than he's got. Billy is keeping watch inside as well as out. If he had a score or more of men there they might mutiny and take the yacht and put out to sea in her, trusting to luck to get away, to divide the gold among them, and then to scuttle the craft and separate to every point of the world."

"Humph! She would soon be overhauled by one of our fast cruisers."

"Would she? Not much! There isn't a cruiser in the world that could catch her. She's the fastest thing that ever was built. She could sail right around anything that is afloat; and more than that, through some hokus-pocus of red tape, her fires are kept banked, and it wouldn't take ten minutes, with forced draught, for her to get under weigh. I don't wonder that Billy Quirk is nervous."

CHAPTER II.

ATTACKED BY PIRATES.

And now we arrive at a change of scene, for there are several incidents connected with this affair which must be explained before Nick Carter appears in person on the carpet.

It was the night immediately following upon the conversation between Jared Clarke and Miron Simmons, which has just been recorded.

The *Howrah* was lying quietly at her anchorage in Erie Basin, and she was swinging uneasily at her chain, for a howling gale had arisen out of the east as the sun went down, and was now singing a dozen tunes at once through the spare rigging of the vessel.

There was more than the mere gale of wind, too, for it had brought with it a driving mist, which had gradually turned to rain, and now, at a trifle past eight bells of the night watch—midnight—it had become a pelting storm; and the raindrops were driven so fiercely by the raging wind that they struck and stung almost like sleet against whatever might be exposed to its fury.

Nevertheless, aboard the yacht, Billy Quirk, the marshal, had not abated one whit of his caution in guarding the treasure that had been left in his care, and he was, when eight bells struck, seated in the shelter of the chart house, just forward of the waist of the vessel.

There was a Winchester rifle across his knees, and there

was a look of fierce determination upon his stern features, too.

The rain storm, which beat fiercely around the corner of the chart house into his face, and which hung in drops upon it, only rendered his aspect the more fierce, and if you could have approached him at that moment, and have glanced into his eyes, it is doubtful, even had you been so inclined before that moment, if you would have had the hardihood to have attempted the looting of the *Howrah*.

Nevertheless, there were others who were near at hand who did contemplate just that very thing, and at the very moment when your attention is called to him they were approaching the anchored yacht stealthily and carefully, determined that the gold and jewels which they knew to be containel in chests in the cabin, should become their property—if theft with its accompanying violence could make it theirs.

At just the moment when the clocks in the city were announcing midnight, two boats put off from the shore, from a secluded spot, and were rowed silently out through the storm and wind toward the *Howrah*.

In each of the boats there were six men, and they seemed to have laid their plans perfectly, so that each man knew what was expected of him.

Not a word was exchanged between them from the moment when they left the shore; and even when, a few moments later, the oarsmen ceased rowing and merely used their oars to hold the boats in a stationary position, there was not a single exchange of opinion between them.

The oarsmen remained at their posts with the oars in their hands, but the others silently divested themselves of their outer clothing, thus revealing the fact—had it been light enough to have seen them—that they were stripped almost naked, being clothed only in swimming trunks.

Each, however, wore a stout leather belt around his waist, and to these were attached the weapons which they might have occasion to use in the hazardous undertaking upon which they had set out.

Two revolvers, loaded with waterproof cartridges, a long and dangerous-looking dagger and a policeman's night stick completed this outfit.

But in addition to all this, and doubtless because it served as a disguise, each of the men had stained his body and features a dark brown, so that they looked in the dim light, not unlike the members of the crew that had once manned that same vessel.

Having prepared themselves for the rest of their journey, the ten men, five from each boat, slipped into the water without a splash or a sound, and still without exchanging a word, swam together toward the yacht.

Five of the men made their way toward the stern of the vessel, while the remaining five swam to the forward chains; and there they clung in silence until their leader had counted two hundred very slowly.

Then, still without speaking, or whispering to his companions, the leader of this five at the bow of the yacht went up the anchor chain hand over hand, and, reaching the deck, he pulled himself silently over the chock block and laid himself at full length in the very peak of the bow.

The brown tint with which he had stained his body, his nakedness and his utter silence as he moved, rendered it next to impossible that he should be discovered, even if one of the men who were on guard aboard the vessel should happen to come his way.

And this is precisely what did happen after he had been in waiting only a few minutes.

From where he was lying, he could see the dark form of the watch against the sky, as the man approached him, and he drew himself still more closely under the shelter of the rail, and waited.

The watch came nearer.

It was clear that part of his duty consisted in going into the extreme bows of the vessel once every little while, and also that this was precisely what the intruders had figured upon.

He remained perfectly silent and motionless as the watchman approached, and it is doubtful, even if the man had looked directly at him, that he would have seen him, so absorbed was the almost naked man by the shadows that surrounded him.

But the watchman did not look down at all.

On the deck of the vessel, underneath the rail and under his very eyes, was the last place in the world where he could have expected to discover an intruder.

He did not turn his eyes there, but looked out over the bow, into the darkness, striving in vain to see the black waters of the basin through the driving storm.

As he looked, he leaned forward a trifle, as if to see the better; and as he did that, the shadowy form rose up behind him until it stood tall and threatening within three feet of the man.

Then, as a particularly fierce gust of wind whistled through the rigging of the vessel, he raised his arm and struck.

If the night had been still, the sound of that blow might have been heard for a considerable distance, but the noise of the gale effectually drowned it, so that it would not have been noticed at a distance of ten feet.

And the watchman?

He collapsed without a sound, stunned, struck senseless by the force of that blow.

Then the man who had delivered it removed part of a coil of stout cord from around his waist, and, having cut it into lengths to suit, deftly bound the feet and hands of his unconscious victim. And then, as if in doubt whether the blow had been sufficiently severe, he quickly manufactured a gag out of several strands of the cord and forced it into the mouth of the man he had struck down.

When all that was done and he knew that his victim

was not only helpless, but also that he was incapable of uttering a sound, even if consciousness should return to him, he leaned over the bow of the vessel and uttered a peculiar hissing sound which must have penetrated to the four men who were still waiting in the water, for in a moment afterward they began to swarm up the chain, so that presently there were five shadows instead of one gathered in the bows of the *Howrah*.

Now, for the first time, a whispered conference was held between them, after which they separated, and one by one made their silent way toward the waist.

Like so many serpents they glided aft, now crouching low, now rising to an upright posture and now lying at full length along the deck, each intent upon what he had personally to attend to, according to the program that had been laid out for him.

It was thus that they approached the after end of the chart house behind which Billy Quirk was seated with the rifle across his knees.

It is true that they could not have known he was there; but it is also true that they confidently expected that somebody would be at that spot, for it was just the place where a man on watch would seat himself in order to escape the violence of the storm, as well as to keep the roaring of the wind out of his ears.

Therefore they approached the spot silently.

There were two of them on either side of the chart house; the fifth man held back and waited for the others to act.

And these two, on either side, held themselves flat upon the deck, so that when they poked their heads around the corners, their browned faces only made a somewhat deeper blur against the deck of the yacht.

Billy Quirk could not have seen them, even had he looked toward them; but that he did not do, for it chanced that at that very moment he was in a brown study, and was gazing aloft toward the hurrying clouds, which, however, he could not see because of the utter blackness of that tempestuous night.

It has been said by somebody that all things are possible of accomplishment, with time and patience; even a squeaky door may be opened without giving out a sound, if sufficient time is employed in the act.

It was evident that these men were working on that principle, for they moved so slowly that they could not be seen to move at all—as slowly as the hour hand of a watch, which, although it seems to hurry fast enough when time presses, yet cannot be seen to move at all.

Their naked bodies made no sound; their slow motion could not attract the eye, and yet with every second of time that passed, they were nearer to the marshal.

But for the terrific storm of that night and the utter fierceness of it, this chapter might never have been written; but, as it was, the rushing of wind and rain covered the approach of the marauders.

The crucial moment arrived at last.

Four brown, naked bodies rose simultaneously from the deck.

One pair of hands seized the rifle and tore it from the grasp of the marshal.

Another of the men used his right hand to clasp it suddenly and forcibly across the marshal's mouth, in order thus to prevent any outcry, while with his left hand he grabbed him by the throat.

A third seized him around the legs with both arms, and clung to them with the strength of desperation, and succeeded in holding them so firmly that although Billy Quirk struggled for just one fleeting instant with all his might, his feet did not even scuffle upon the deck.

The fourth man used the club.

He was the leader of that party; the man who had made use of it upon the watchman at the bow, and he did it well and thoroughly.

Just as his watchman had gone down before his attack, so Billy Quirk fell, and a moment later he was bound and gagged and utterly helpless, like that other man in the forward chains.

And as yet there had not been a sound that the pirates made which could have been heard ten feet away.

With the party who approached the vessel at the stern, things had gone about the same.

They had swam up under the overhang, and then waiting until a particularly fierce gust of wind and rain would drown any noise they might make, one of them threw a rubber-covered grappling hook over the rail, where it caught and held securely.

Then they waited again to discover if the action had been observed, and, finding that it had not, the leader of that party had gone up the rope attached to it hand over hand until he could draw himself upon the deck over the rail, as his associate had done at the bow.

And here, as it afterward appeared, luck was with these men.

The watchman at the stern, who should have been close to the taffrail and on the alert, had stretched himself under the lee of the rail out of the reach of wind and rain—and he had permitted himself to fall asleep.

They found him as their companions had found the others, and he was knocked on the head in the same manner, bound and gagged.

That done, they glided forward, creeping along the deck like worms, and as silently as shadows, for they knew that there should be four men on watch, and they expected their companions to take care of two of them only.

But it happened that the fourth man had gone below for a moment, and so they could not find him.

They had about determined that they had cleared the decks of watchmen, for their companions from the bow

joined them then, when suddenly the fourth man appeared directly in front, and so discovered them.

CHAPTER III.

THE ESCAPE OF THE "HOWRAH."

Thus suddenly confronted, the ten men acted simultaneously, for they all leaped upon the fourth watchman on the instant.

He was borne to the deck beneath them, of course, and at once; too quickly to permit him to make use of the rifle he carried, but not soon enough to keep him from uttering a yell of warning to those of his companions who were below.

Short work was made of him, however, and after only a moment, he was knocked senseless, as the others had been, and bound and gagged in his turn.

Two of the pirates sufficed for this work; the remaining eight dashed into the cabin, for if a fight with the remaining watchmen on the yacht, of which it was known there were only three, were necessary, they preferred that it should take place below, where there would be much less chance for the noise of it to reach the outside world.

It is true that they did not fear that such a noise would penetrate to the shore through the violence of the storm, but there was a chance that occupants of other vessels and yachts anchored near to the *Howrah* might hear it.

But again fortune was with the pirates, for only one of the men had been aroused—and he was the only one upon whom a deadly weapon was used.

He encountered the man who had been the leader of the party that had boarded the yacht over the bow, and that individual used his knife, for somehow he had lost his club.

It was a deadly blow that he delivered, too, and its victim sank back with a groan and expired almost instantly.

After that the rest was comparatively easy.

The remaining two watchmen were found in their berths, overpowered, knocked senseless, bound and gagged, and the pirates were in possession of the *Howrah* with all her immense hoard of gold and precious stones.

Still they made no sound; still there was no talking between them; but as if the very circumstance of the present condition had been foreseen, one of them slipped away, dove into the water and swam swiftly toward the place where the two boats were awaiting them.

And here it would have seemed as if their next move should have been to have brought the boats alongside, to have loaded the treasure into them and have conveyed it safely to the shore, thus deserting the vessel with its senseless and helpless guardians.

But that is precisely what they did not do.

They did a very different thing.

They took very much greater chances; chances, which, if you had been an observer, you would have regarded as little short of suicidal. But all that we shall presently discover.

When the two boats were drawn up beside the vessel, the men who had been knocked senseless and also rendred helpless, were carried, one by one, to the side and lowered into them.

When that was done and the seven men, including, of course, the marshal, Billy Quirk, had been lowered into the two boats, two of the pirates clambered in also and the six living men, with the one corpse, were rowed to the shore.

There, under the denser shadow of a warehouse, the whole seven were piled promiscuously into one boat, and the two oarsmen clambered into the other and rowed back to the *Howrah,* where, after climbing aboard, the small boat was cast adrift, to wander whither it would.

And in the meantime the men on the yacht had not been idle.

Two of them had gone below to the furnaces; two more went forward to the anchor chain; others sought the engine room, the wheel house and the bridge.

After half an hour of steady work the two funnels of the vessel began to belch smoke and jets of flame, and when that happened, word was quietly passed forward to the men at the anchor chain, and a moment later the end of the chain which had been attached to the windlass and which had been deftly cut in twain by the workers, was lowered quietly into the water and allowed to sink to the bottom of the basin.

At the same instant the yacht trembled through her entire length; the twin screws began to revolve, and she forged ahead, at first very slowly, and then with increasing speed until she was dashing through the storm and the black night at a twenty-knot clip, toward the Narrows.

And this was what seemed the suicidal thing for the pirates to do.

At this age and time it seems incredible that a steamer of the size of the *Howrah* could hope to escape the crews of the nations of the world, and that it would have been much more logical for them to have taken their booty ashore and have abandoned the vessel.

Also, there was the danger of collision with some vessel in that wild dash for the open sea through such a gale of wind and storm; but whatever the dangers of the run might have been, the unknown navigator of the *Howrah* succeeded in avoiding them.

He knew the channel, too, for when the storm had passed and the sun came up the next morning, the *Howrah* had disappeared as effectually as if the ocean had swallowed her, and not a sign of her had been seen or heard since the last view of her by a policeman on the shore, just before darkness hid her from view the preceding night, while she was lying gracefully at her anchorage.

Nor had anyone been apprised of her going.

The noise of her engines when she got under weigh and escaped through the darkness and the storm had not been heard; the belching of smoke from her funnels when the forced draught was applied to her furnaces had not been seen.

With the closing in of night she was there; with the dawning of day she had disappeared.

That was all.

But, no! it was not all.

There were the two small boats; one with its freight of half-dead men, and one who was quite dead, tied to the old warehouse in the lee of the gale, and the other, which had drifted across the basin and had forced its way under a wharf, where it was found later.

A policeman discovered the boat filled with the former guardians of the *Howrah*, and after releasing them from their bonds and gags, he rang for an ambulance, and they were conveyed to the Long Island College Hospital.

It turned out then that Billy Quirk was less injured than any of his men, and after an hour or two of attention from the doctors, he was able to leave the institution.

A cab had been called for him at his request, and his first act was to have himself driven to the basin, where for a long time he sat in his vehicle, gazing sadly toward the spot where the *Howrah* had been anchored.

"I knew it," he muttered to himself, over and over again. "I knew it just as well as I knew my own name; but I'm blowed if it ever entered my head that they would get away with the whole shooting match like that."

While he was still gazing dejectedly at the vacant anchorage, Miron Simmons came ashore from his yawl and approached the spot where Billy was rapidly dissolving to tears over the catastrophe he had suffered.

"Hello, Billy," he exclaimed. "Where's the *Howrah?*"

"At the bottom of the sea, I hope, Mr. Simmons," was the reply. "Tell me, maybe you heard something during the night. Did you?"

"Not a sound save the roaring of the gale."

"And saw nothing, either?"

"Not a blessed thing, Billy."

"It beats the devil; doesn't it?"

"They certainly beat you, all right."

"Say, Mr. Simmons, how do you suppose they ever did it?"

"You ought to know if anybody does, Billy. You were there."

"Was I? Faith, I'm beginning to doubt it. It seemed to me as if a giant with three or four pair of hands grabbed me at the same instant, and then I knew nothing more until I opened my eyes to find that a blue-coated copper was looking down at me while I was lying with an aching head in the bottom of a small boat. And they killed poor Tom Creegan. Poor lad. What would you advise me to do, Mr. Simmons?"

"Well, it strikes me that your first duty is to report the affair officially, to the proper authorities. I don't think I can suggest anything after that—unless you borrow a bathing suit and swim after the yacht."

"Huh!" said Billy, not appreciating the joke, or not being in a mood for joking.

Then he called to his driver.

"Cabby," he said, "do you happen to know where Nick Carter lives?"

"I do, sir. I have driven him in this cab more than once, and a fine man he is, too!"

"True for you, son. Take me there, and don't spare horseflesh. Good-day, Mr. Simmons."

"So long, Billy. Good luck to you. I think you are going to the right place."

"So do I. If anybody can help me, he can."

"But even he cannot catch that yacht, Billy."

"I'm not so sure of that. He catches most things that he starts out after, and I wouldn't wonder if he managed somehow to catch up with the *Howrah*. One thing is certain, he will see a whole lot further into the affair than anybody else could."

"Good luck to you, Billy."

"Thank you, Mr. Simmons."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERY OF CARRUTHERS' ESCAPE.

At the very moment when the unfortunate marshal was discussing his loss with Miron Simmons, Nick Carter was talking over the telephone with Inspector O'Brien. And it is necessary, in order to have a clear understanding of the situation, that the conversation be recorded.

"Is that you, Nick?" it began.

"Yes."

"This is O'Brien—Steve."

"Yes."

"Carruthers has escaped."

"What?"

"Maitland Carruthers has escaped from—well, not exactly from the Tombs, although that was where he was kept, but from two officers who were bringing him down here to headquarters for an interview with me in my private office."

"When did it happen?"

"Last night, about half-past six o'clock."

"I wish you had told me about it at once."

"So do I—now; but I had no doubt that we would get him again inside of an hour. I think he must have gone up in a balloon, Nick; or down in a mine; or have jumped into the river."

"Can't get a trace of him, eh?"

"Nary a trace."

"How did it happen? What was he doing on the street, anyhow?"

"Well, he sent me word that he had a whole lot of confessions to make, and that if I would have him taken to my office he would make them to me. One of them, he said, was about a plot—another plot, mind you—to blow up Orloff's, and get the ruby, and another was a plan for robbing Carnegie's house while he is away in Scotland. There were two or three others, but they don't cut any ice just now."

"I should think not."

"How did he get away?"

"Why, a crowd in Bleecker Street just closed in around the officers. They appeared to be fighting among themselves, but they managed to hustle the officers around so that Carruthers broke away during the excitement, and he has not been seen since. That's the story."

"What are you going to do about it, Steve?"

"Why, I'm going to try to catch him again. That is the only thing there is to do, and I want you to take a hand."

"All right."

"Can you blow in down here some time this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"All right. I'll look for you about four; eh?"

"Yes; good-by."

It was a little more than an hour later when Billy Quirk appeared at the home of the detective, and he looked about as dejected and done up as a man can look.

"Hello, Billy," said Nick, in greeting. "What is the matter with you? You look as if you had lost your last friend."

"Well, I feel something like that, Nick, if anybody should come down in the elevator and ask you. Say, have you been out of the house to-day?"

"No," replied the detective, "I have not. I think it is the only day this year when I have kept inside, too, but I had some work to do here, and so I shut myself up to do it."

"Then you haven't heard about my affair, eh?"

"Can't say I have, Billy. What is it?"

"The extras are on the street about it already, and one of them has got my picture in it, too."

"You don't say! Have you been shooting somebody, Billy?"

"No; but I came mighty near being killed myself. Say, Nick, the *Howrah's* gone."

"Eh? The *Howrah?* The rajah's yacht."

"That same."

"Gone where?"

"The devil only knows; I don't, that's certain."

"She didn't fly away, did she?"

"It amounts to about the same thing. Anyhow, she's gone."

"How did she happen to go without you? I thought you were a fixture aboard that craft?"

"So did I; but I happened to be one of the fixtures which didn't go with the property."

"Tell me about it, Billy."

"Well, you know what an infernal storm we had last night, don't you?"

"Yes."

"It howled like all creation down there in the basin, and you couldn't hear yourself think; take my word for it, you couldn't. I knew it was a bad night, and just such a night as a lot of pirates would select if they wanted to come aboard the *Howrah* and try to get away with the treasure, so I took charge of the night watch myself."

"I thought you always did that, since you have been there."

"I took charge of every watch, for the matter of that; but a man has to get a little sleep sometimes, and last night I needed it. However, I resolved to stay up. I posted one of my men in the chains at the bow, and I took my own station just abaft of the chart house, which is about at the for'ard quarter. I put another just abaft the waist, and a fourth man was at the stern. It was Tom Creegan who was in the waist, and they killed him."

"Killed him?"

"Yes; knifed him. Stuck him straight through the heart, too."

"Well, go on."

"I've talked with the rest of the men, those who were on watch and those who were below—you know we were seven in all, I suppose—and as their stories are precisely the same as my own with just the difference of location, I'll tell mine and then answer any questions you may want to ask."

"That's the ticket. Go ahead."

"Well, as I said, I was behind the chart house. I was as wide awake as I am now, and I would not have believed that a mouse could have crept up on me without my hearing it.

"I sat there with my Winchester across my knees, just as much on the alert as I ever was in my life, when all of a sudden it seemed just as if I was grabbed by a giant who had three or four pairs of hands.

"My legs were seized and held so that I could not move them; the rifle was jerked out of my grasp; my wind was shut off and a hand was clapped over my mouth all at the same instant, and in the next I got a rap on my head. Now, that's the story, and that's all I know about it, save that I woke up in a small boat after daylight this morning with a cop staring me in the face and asking me what had happened.

"We were taken to the hospital and treated, but I was less hurt than the others, and I lit out as soon as I could. I had myself driven to the basin and looked at the spot where the *Howrah* ought to be; then I came here."

"You say that the stories of the other men are precisely the same as your own?" asked the detective.

"Well, there is just a little difference. The man in the forward chains says that something dropped on him, and he didn't know a thing till he woke up in the boat alongside of me. It was Creegan who was in the waist, and he's dead and can't tell, if he knows any more. My man at the stern says that he had laid down under the lee of the rail to be out of the wind for a breath or two, when he was hit on the head by something. That's all he knows.

"The three men below heard somebody shout, and started to run out on deck. One of them says he saw a lot of naked men with brown skins. He says there was about a hundred of them, and then he got a rap on the nut, and went out of business. Whoever the devils were, they knew how to navigate, for when daylight came the yacht was clean gone, and not a soul in the basin had seen or heard her go. Now, what do you think of it?"

"It looks to me like a very perfectly carried out plan."

"It was carried out all right."

"What are you going to do about it, Billy?"

"That is precisely what I came here to ask you. What shall I do?"

"We cannot very well swim after her, can we?"

"That is exactly what Mr. Simmons said to me."

"Who? Do you refer to Mr. Miron Simmons?"

"Yes; he's got a yawl named the *Sylph.*"

"Yes; I know him. Did you ask him if he heard anything?"

"I did, and he didn't hear a thing any more than anybody else."

"It is a very mysterious affair, taken altogether, isn't it?"

"I should say it was."

Nick wheeled in his chair and picked up the receiver of his telephone. Then he asked for police headquarters, and when he was connected, he called for Inspector O'Brien.

"Hello, old man," he said, when the inspector replied to the summons.

"That you, Nick?"

"Yes. Say!"

"Well? What is it?"

"Have you got on the track of Carruthers yet?"

"What is the matter with you? It isn't two hours since I telephoned to you about him."

"That is true, all right, but in that two hours some information has come to me which enables me to tell you exactly where he is."

"The devil it does! Where is he?"

"On board the *Howrah.*"

"What?"

"Haven't you heard about the *Howrah?*"

"Sure. I guess everybody in the city has heard about it by this time. You are right, too. That is exactly where Carruthers is, without a doubt. And the whole thing about confessing to me was a plant from the beginning."

"Who was it went to you with the message from him?"

"A fellow named Clarke; nobody whom I ever saw before."

"Was it Jared Clarke?"

"Yes; that was the name. Do you know who he is?"

"Yes; but that is about all I do know about him. Fortunately, however, I know where I can find out all I want to know about him. I think I won't wait till four o'clock to go down to your office. You may look for me in about two hours."

The detective hung up the receiver and turned again to Billy Quirk.

"You overheard my end of the conversation," he said, "and you doubtless guessed pretty close to what was said at the other end, didn't you?"

"Yes; I gathered that you at least know who one of those men were who attacked me last night."

"Well, Billy, I can't exactly say that I know; but I am morally certain that the leader of the whole thing was Maitland Carruthers. He was the man who was arrested with the rajah, you know."

"Yes; I have heard about him."

"There is another argument in favor of the supposition that he was the leader of the attack, and that is the making away with the yacht itself. Anybody else but him would have been satisfied with knocking you fellows out, and would have taken the two chests of treasure ashore; but Carruthers had to get away out of the country. He knew that if he remained here I would find him and take him back to prison, and there is only one fate awaiting him when he gets there; besides, he is an expert navigator.

"I think I know his game. He has picked up a few trusty men for the initial part of the act of piracy, and he probably did it through Clarke."

"Do you mean Clarke, of the schooner *Thunder?*"

"That is the man."

"The schooner is at anchor over at the basin now."

"All the better. You know where to find one of the judges of the United States Circuit Court, do you not?"

"Sure thing."

"Then, when you leave here, I want you to find one of them and from him get authority to search the *Thunder* from stem to stern; and now, to return to Carruthers for a moment. He has picked up a few trusty men to help him do the act of capturing the *Howrah,* and somewhere else he has a crew for the yacht awaiting him. He wasn't afraid to put out to sea in that gale because he is not afraid of anything living or dead. He is the most daring scoundrel I ever knew."

"He certainly is the slickest I ever heard of," muttered Billy, rubbing his sore head.

"Now, Billy, how badly do you want to catch him?"

"Well, Nick, my vocabulary isn't very extensive, but if you will group all the words in the dictionary together and then add a few more which don't look well in print, that would about half express my ideas on the subject."

"Bad enough to call up the attorney general in Washington over the long distance and ask him for leave of absence for a long time?"

"You bet!"

"Then do that very thing, after you have seen the judge. And now, here is what I want you to do at once. I want you to find Mr. Simmons for me, and ask him to go to the office of Inspector O'Brien as soon as possible and to meet me there. He will do it. Then get aboard the *Thunder* and make a search of her. By the way, you say she is at anchor there; do you know that to be a fact?"

"Why, certainly; I——"

"When did you notice her the last time?"

"Just before the storm broke yesterday afternoon."

"Was she there when you went down to the anchorage after you left the hospital to-day?"

"To save my life, I couldn't tell you. I didn't notice."

"It is about a thousand to one that she was not there. However, you might as well go and look for her. And after that you can pick up any information you can find along the shore. It might be well to look into the history of those small boats before you meet me at the inspector's office, for I want you to go there, also. There might be something worth knowing in connection with them.

"Now, you have got your cue—go ahead with your part. Transform yourself into a detective for once in your life. When I first knew you I used to think that you might have made a good one."

"I'll try. You can bet your sweet life I will try!"

"I haven't a doubt of it; and I have a sort of an idea, Billy, that we will find a way to catch that yacht, and the men who are aboard of her; and we won't have to swim after her to do it, either. She is rather fast, but I think I know a way to beat her; anyhow, we'll try."

"If anybody can do it you are the man, Nick. I haven't a doubt of that; but how in the world you are going to go about it is more than I can pretend to guess."

"You will find out soon enough; so now, go and do what I have directed, and then meet me at the office of the inspector."

CHAPTER V.

SETTING A PIRATE TO CATCH A PIRATE.

"Well, Nick," was the greeting that the detective received when he entered the private office of Inspector O'Brien, "it appears that we have got a twentieth-century pirate on our hands, doesn't it?"

"It looks a little bit that way; yes."

"He won't be an easy one to catch, either."

"No; but I think the thing can be done."

"Do you? How?"

"For one thing, we will have to take the law into our own hands."

"I am quite willing to do that—provided we accomplish what we set out to do. But I will confess that I don't see exactly how we are to overtake the fastest yacht that floats, or what we are to catch her with, or how we are to capture her after we have caught up with her, if such a thing is within the range of possibility."

"The catching up with her will be the easiest part of it."

"You haven't got a flying machine, have you, Nick? Or you haven't found the wonderful submarine of Capt Nemo's, have you?"

"Neither one nor the other, Steve."

"What, then?"

"We have got railroads across the continent."

"So we have"—dryly—"but we don't happen to have any across the ocean."

"We don't need one there. We can do the act better in another way."

"Perhaps you will tell me what you are driving at when you get to it."

"Very well; you will agree with me, will you not, that Carruthers is aboard the yacht, and that if he is, he is also her commander?"

"Yes."

"And the rajah is still in prison, isn't he?"

"He is, by thunder! and I'll take mighty good care that he doesn't get out of it, either, save through the house with the little door."

"Do you also happen to know that Maitland Carruthers is every bit as good at disguising himself as I am?"

"You have told me so, that is all I know about it. I never happened to come in contact with the fellow until this last affair of his, you know."

"Well, I don't believe that I can beat him at disguises. That being agreed between us, what does it strike you that he will do?"

"You tell."

"The rajah is in prison——"

"You said that once before."

"The rajah is in prison; Carruthers has got the *Howrah;* he is at sea on the fastest thing that floats; he also has possession of the gold and jewels; at the other side of the world there is a great palace built of stone that so strongly resembles marble that you could not tell the difference from a distance of a thousand yards; surrounding that palace are about a million acres of land which belong to the man who owns the palace; upon that

land are herds of cattle, droves of sheep, legions of horses, hundreds of trained elephants and the accessories which accompany all that I have mentioned, to say nothing of thousands of men and women whose very souls are owned by the rajah who rules over them.

"In the vaults of the palace are other millions in gold and jewels.

"To the south of this realm that I have described, which is Matarapur, there is another almost as large and almost as rich; it is called Bahmpoor, and the rajah of Matarapur is also the rajah of Bahmpoor. Do you follow me?"

"Well, you are taking me quite a distance from home, but I'm trying to do so."

"The real rajah is in prison——"

"That is three times you have said that."

"And he won't get out of it save to go to the electric chair. Carruthers knows that."

"I expect he does know it."

"Well, here is the point: When the *Howrah* arrives and anchors somewhere along the coast of India, the rajah of Matarapur and Bahmpoor will have returned to his own, notwithstanding the fact that he is really languishing in prison in America awaiting execution."

"By Jove, Nick, you have hit the nail on the head."

"Carruthers will have transformed himself into the rajah, and he will have done it so thoroughly and so well that not one of his followers there will ever suspect the change of identities. He will reign in Matarapur—if he ever reaches there; and if he does succeed in getting there, we may as well give up the game."

"So the thing is to head him off before he gets there, eh?"

"Precisely that."

"And you mean to go west while he is going east?"

"Sure; but you do not realize how much further he has got to go than we have."

"No, not so blooming much, I don't think! The Suez route——"

"That is exactly the point. He will not dare to take that route. He will have to take one of the other two that are left open to him. He will have to round Cape Horn, or the Cape of Good Hope, one or the other. Don't you see that?"

"Yes, I do."

"He wouldn't dare attempt the Suez route, for we would have him held up at Port Said, and he knows it. He won't take any such chances as that. He will round one cape or the other on his voyage to India."

"Which one do you think he will select?"

"Probably the Cape of Good Hope—for two reasons."

"What are they?"

"Well, for one thing, his route would be about six or seven thousand miles shorter by that route than by the other. In round numbers, it is eighteen thousand miles from New York to India by the way of Cape Horn, and something like twelve thousand if you go around Africa. The other reason is that the Cape Horn route is apt to be very stormy at this season of the year. It is winter down there now, you know.

"But it doesn't make any difference to me which of the routes he selects, as long as I am certain that he will have to take one or the other of them. The point is that I can beat him there."

"If you only knew where to look for him when you get there; eh?"

"Well, I think there is a way to find that out, too."

"How?"

"Let us put ourselves in Carruthers' place for a few moments; or, rather, let me do it, and tell you exactly what I would do if I were in Carruthers' shoes at this moment, and possessed of his desires, ambitions and attainments."

"That isn't at all a bad idea. We will suppose that you are Carruthers. Go ahead."

"Having escaped from New York harbor, and shipped my crew, I would run directly for one of the islands of the Bahama group. It would not be difficult to find a harbor there where I would be absolutely isolated. Having discovered such a place, I would anchor, and then I would put my crew to work at painting the hull of the *Howarth* white. I would stay there long enough, too, to put on several coats so that the black would not show through. I would, of course, paint out the name *Howrah,* and substitute another."

"You might as well go far enough to say what name you would make use of in the substitution."

"No; I won't go as far as that. He might use *Nadja* for a name, however. It would be like him, and I think that Carruthers was really in love with the young princess who was murdered by the rajah. But to continue."

"Yes."

"Having done all that, I would continue on my voyage. Now, the coal bunkers of the *Howrah* haven't capacity enough for more than four, or, at the most, five thousand miles, so I would have to stop to take on coal at several places along the route. At one of those places I would cable to my agent in Bombay—and the rajahs of India always have an agent at the nearest seaport.

"I would already have selected some secluded harbor along one of the coasts of India, and I would direct my agent to send to Matarapur, or to go there and give directions that I be met by a sufficient retinue at the port I had selected.

"Now, inspector, the voyage would necessarily be a long one. The stoppages for coal and provisions would lengthen it."

"Certainly."

"All that will give you and me plenty of time to get to India far in advance of his arrival there. It would,

for instance, give me a chance to go all the way to Matarapur; to appear there in disguise; to find out what those orders were that had been received from the rajah, and to get out again, back to Bombay, where you will be waiting for me.

"I think that even then we would have a month or two of time for preparation for what we might decide to do."

"And so be on hand to meet Carruthers when he arrives; eh?"

"Exactly."

"It is a dandy scheme, Nick, if you think it can be done."

"I am positive that it can be done. There is only one thing that stands in the way; or, rather, there are two things."

"What are they?"

"The chase will be a very expensive one, and we must become pirates ourselves in order to capture this pirate."

"A little game of setting a pirate to catch a pirate, eh?"

"Just that. We have got to capture him and bring him back into American waters before we could have the sanction of the law in holding him. You know that."

"Certainly. We must go outside the law."

"Or rise above it."

"Either that you are pleased to call it."

"Well, I don't care about that part of it. We could do all that easy enough. The other objection you make is the sticker."

"You refer to the expense?"

"Yes."

"Well, Steve, I think I know a way in which that can be overcome."

"By Jove, Nick! If you do, I'll go on that expedition with you in person. I haven't had a vacation in a long time, and that is the sort of one that would about hit me where I live."

"I think I know a way in which it can be done."

"Tell me about it."

"I have already sent word for a friend of mine whose name is Miron Simmons, to come here. He should appear in the next half hour. Do you happen to know him?"

"I know who he is. He's in Standard Oil, isn't he?"

"Yes; he is one of the 'System'; and he is worth about thirty millions, more or less."

"Well? Is it your idea that he will put up the dough?"

"Not precisely that, but something very much like it. He knocks about the harbor a good deal in his yawl, the *Sylph;* but he owns a big steam yacht, a hundred and sixty feet long, also, which is about as fast as they make them, although she wouldn't be one-two-three with the *Howrah.* All the same, she could get to Bombay by the Suez route in time for our uses, and we could meet her there. Or, at least, I would do that. You could make the voyage with Simmons in the *Alert,* while I would start at once across the continent, and thence via the Canadian Pacific steamers for the other side. I could in that way get to India, find out what I wish to know at Matarapur, and meet you in Bombay."

"Do you think Simmons will do it?"

"I do. He is fond of adventure. He has got the time and the money to do it, and I think he will jump at the chance. He has often asked me to take him in on one of my cases, and he will snap at this offer; you see?"

"By Jove, I hope he will!"

At that moment the office door opened, an officer entered and laid a card on the desk in front of his chief; and on that card was engraved the name of Miron Simmons.

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER'S WELCOME PROPHECY.

"Miron," said the detective, addressing his friend as soon as the introductions were over; "is the *Alert* in commission?"

"Sure thing, Nick. Of course she is."

"Where is she?"

"At Newport. I am going down there this evening to take a cruise in her. I wish you would go along, for I give you my word that so far I haven't asked another soul, and if you'll go, I'll give you *carte blanche* to invite your own party, and we will go wherever you please, if it is around the world."

Nick laughed aloud, so pleased was he by the reply.

"That is something very like what I was about to ask you to do for me," he said.

"Then consider it done before you ask the question."

"Wait till you hear what my proposition is."

"All right; let her out, Nick. I'm listening, but I'll call you before you make the play."

"You know about the *Howrah,* and how she was cut out and stolen last night, don't you?"

"I should say I do; and say, Nick, I'll bet a hundred that Jared Clarke is aboard of her."

"I should not be surprised if he were. In fact, I think he is."

"I had a talk with him about the *Howrah,* you know; told him all about the boodle that was aboard of her and how nervous Billy Quirk was about it all; mentioned that fellow Carruthers, and Clarke said he knew him; and all that. The next thing I discover is that the *Howrah* has disappeared with the gold aboard of her, Billy is set ashore half dead, and—Mister Jared Clarke has disappeared after giving his brother a bill of sale of his schooner, the *Thunder.* But go ahead with your proposition."

"The inspector and I want you to take us in the *Alert* to capture the *Howrah.*"

"Eh? I only wish I could do it; but, great Scott, man,

the *Alert* couldn't catch the *Howrah* in a thousand years."

"Yes, she can, too, for the *Alert* will go across lots, while the *Howrah* is going around."

"I'm rather smart, Nick; I once took a diploma for something or other at college, but you have feased me there. Would you mind giving me a key to the cryptogram?"

Then, in as few words as possible, the detective went again over the same ground he had covered in his conversation with the inspector; and he found at the close of the argument that Simmons was quite as enthusiastic as either of them were.

"Will I do it?" he exclaimed. "Well, I should say I would! That for the cost of the thing!" and he snapped his fingers contemptuously. "Say, Nick, I wouldn't sell my chances for a good time in this expedition for a million. Give you my word I wouldn't."

"Then it is settled, eh?"

"Settled? On the spot. We haven't got any time to lose, either, have we?"

"We haven't got any to spare."

"Well, I'm ready. We can go to Newport to-night and sail from there in the morning. The *Alert* is provisioned, and coaled, and watered for a long voyage. There is absolutely not a thing to do but to step aboard of her and give the order to sail. The only thing I am sorry about is that you are not going with us on the first part of the voyage."

"You will have the inspector, for he has promised to go; and I will join you at Bombay."

"All right. Fix it to suit yourself."

After that Nick turned again to the inspector.

"We will need about a dozen or fifteen good fighters along with us," he said. "I will leave that part of it to you; eh?"

"Yes; I will attend to that right away."

"There is only one thing about them to be particular about; they should be men who are trustworthy, and who will fight if need be; and——"

"And you can offer them whatever pay you wish and I'll foot the bill," interrupted the owner of the *Alert*.

"I can pick out the men—and the right sort of men, too—who will be delighted to go with us for the fun of the thing," said the inspector.

"And I will let you have Patsy and Ten-Ichi," added Nick. "I shall take Chick with me, for I will need somebody with me when I get to India. Besides, there is Billy Quirk; he will want to go with us."

"And he shall, if he can get away," said the inspector. "He is a fighter, all right; and he has got something to fight for in this matter."

"He has that," commented the detective; "and as far as I am concerned, he shall have all the credit for the capture when we make it."

"You seem to be mighty certain that you will make the capture," said Simmons.

"I am. I haven't a doubt of it at all. The only thing I am worrying about is Bombay."

"What is the matter with Bombay?"

"Nothing, save the fact that Carruthers may decide to make port on the eastern coast of India—say somewhere in the vicinity of the mouth of the Kistna River; or he may run up the river. He can go up that river with the *Howrah* almost a hundred miles, and then he would not be more than another hundred from the city of Haidarabad. From there he could go by rail to Hinganghat, or Akola, and he would only have then to cross the mountains to Matarapur. By Jove! I believe that is exactly what he will do."

"Then why not send us to the mouth of that river instead of to Bombay?"

"That is what I will do. I am glad I thought of it. Carruthers will do that very thing, for he will wish to fight as shy as possible of Bombay, and he couldn't leave the *Howrah* in any coast harbor without danger of her being overhauled.

"Yes; that is the idea," he continued, after a pause during which he thought deeply. "Guntoor, in the Kistna River, or Rajahmund, in the Godavari River, will be your destination, and you will stop and wait at Madras until you receive a cable from me or see me. That is the plan. I can go from Bombay to Madras by rail, or I can go by rail to either of the other points I have mentioned."

"Then it is decided," said Simmons.

It was at this moment that Billy Quirk arrived, and by the inspector's direction was admitted at once.

"Well, Billy," said Nick, "what have you accomplished?"

"Mighty little. I went through the *Thunder* from stem to stern, and got my trouble for my pains. All that I found out there was that Jared Clarke has sold the schooner to his brother, and has gone to Europe. Sailed this morning, I was told."

"I think that is correct, Billy," smiled Nick. "He sailed on the *Howrah*."

"Sure."

"What more?"

"Nothing more. I got no information alongshore. The boats were stolen from the moorings, as I supposed they were. Those fellows did not leave the ghost of a trace behind them."

"How about that leave of absence?"

"I got that, all right. I telephoned to Washington, as you suggested, and got it."

"Very good. In that case you are to place yourself under the order of the inspector at once, and the first thing he will tell you will be to go to your home and pack your grip for a long voyage. Then you will meet him at—— What train will you take, Simmons?"

"The first one out, as far as I am concerned."

"We will take the midnight train for Newport, Billy," said the inspector. "I can't complete all my arrangements before that time, Nick."

Nick left his chair and walked to the window.

After a moment he returned to them and said:

"All right. I'm off. I won't see you again until we meet somewhere in India, but I think that everything is understood between us."

"Everything; yes."

"You will need a good supply of arms, inspector."

"You get along about your end of the thing and leave our end to us," said Simmons, with a good-natured laugh. "I'm going to have the time of my life in this thing, and don't you forget it."

"Good-by till we meet again," said Nick.

He shook hands all around and left the office without looking back.

* * * * * * *

India.

There is something about the mere sound of the name which carries with it a suggestion of the mysterious, a thought of the occult and an admonition of caution to the stranger.

Nick Carter and his assistant, Chick, arrived in Bombay in due course of time. A day later they were at Jaignon, and at the close of the second day they retired to rest in a little hotel at Akola, a place of fifteen thousand or more inhabitants, and thoroughly Indian.

"From here we will make our real start," said the detective, to his assistant. "In the morning we will take horse for the valley of Matarapur, which is a ride of between a hundred and a hundred and fifty miles."

They carried out this plan exactly; but after they had covered the first fifty miles of the distance, they turned their horses into a jungle, where they remained for the balance of that day and the ensuing night.

When they reappeared on the road to Matarapur the following morning, neither of them was recognizable as the persons who had traveled that way the preceding day, for both had been transformed into natives.

Nick Carter had become a teacher and a reader.

A long, white beard covered his face and flowed down over his chest. The costume he wore and the shape of his turban bespoke his calling, and the man who rode beside him could not have been mistaken for other than his servant.

Throughout India men of the profession that Nick had adopted are constantly traveling. They are always and everywhere received with the greatest respect, and are accorded unlimited hospitality wherever they chance to stop.

More than that, they are eagerly sought because of their profound learning, and of their supposed powers of divination upon certain subjects.

Nick Carter in this guise had no fear of detection, especially as he knew that neither the rajah nor Carruthers would be at Matarapur to look with suspicion upon any stranger who might present himself.

Both the detective and his assistant spoke the language of the country fluently, and they, therefore, had nothing to fear on that score; and, moreover, they intended to tarry only long enough to glean the information of which they had come in search.

They traversed the remainder of the distance to the palace of the rajah without incident, and timed themselves so that they arrived at the entrance just as the sun was going down.

A cousin of the rajah's, temporarily in charge of the realm, received them, not only with pronounced cordiality, but with ill-concealed eagerness.

In fact, he demonstrated his joy because of the presence of the teacher and seer in such an emphatic manner that the detective was at first inclined to be suspicious; but when, later in the evening, the koohnar—for that was his official title—invited him to his private apartments, he was speedily reassured.

The detective had taken the name of the city—or, rather, the village—from which he was supposed to hail; a place called Nogar, in the State of Cashmir, on the slope of the Himalayas.

"I have much to ask of you, O Nogar," he said to Nick, as soon as they were alone together. "Tell me if you can look off across the waste of waters of the ocean and discern if one of my kindred is there."

"I have already been informed," replied Nick, evasively, "that your cousin, the rajah, is absent. I was told that he is in England."

"Possibly. Possibly, O seer. Nevertheless, turn your eyes into the unknown and tell me what I ask of you. Is there one of my kindred afloat on the waste of waters of the world at this moment?"

"Bring me a dish and a lighted taper," commanded the detective, "and I will gaze for you."

They were brought to him, and he placed them on a stool between him and the koohnar.

Then, from beneath his robes he took a small box which was filled with fine steel filings, and from another place of receptacle he produced a phial of alcohol.

Having poured the alcohol into the dish, he lighted it with the waxen taper, after which he bowed his head and clasped his hands together as if in meditation, or prayer.

For a long time he made no motion whatever after that; but at last he straightened up, and, taking a pinch of the steel filings between his thumb and finger, he held the metal aloft and permitted it to slip slowly, bit by bit, from his grasp into the blaze.

Steel filings, if sufficiently fine, will flash like powder if dropped slowly upon a blaze; and, more than that, it will afford the eyes every variation of the colors of the

rainbow, if it be the best of steel, and is dropped very slowly and regularly upon the flame.

The koohnar was plainly interested in the operation that was going forward, and he watched with eagerness the preparations made by the detective, and could not restrain himself from expressing his admiration aloud when the colors showed in the flame.

But Nick did not raise his head or appear to notice the koohnar at all.

He kept his eyes fixed upon the flame, muttering something that was unintelligible the while; and this performance he kept up for almost a quarter of an hour.

At the end of that time he restored what remained of the steel filings to the box and returned it to its hiding place among his robes; then he extinguished the blaze in the dish and raised his eyes until they met the koohnar's.

"Well?" said the latter, with intense eagerness.

"I have seen much; much that were better left unseen," said the detective.

"You have seen my kinsman?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"At sea, as you doubtless knew ere you asked me to read for you."

"Ay; I knew it, for I have heard from him."

"Then why ask of me for information?"

"Tell me, O seer, what you have looked upon. Tell me truly. I would know. Tell me, and you shall go hence so laden with costly presents and jewels that an extra steed will be required to convey them."

"So be it. I will tell you."

"I listen, Nogar."

"I see that the rajah of Matarapur approaches this coast on a vessel which is propelled by steam; I see that he does not go to Bombay, nor to Madras, but it does appear that he will approach the eastern coast—perhaps where the Kistna River puts into the ocean."

"Ay; that is the place. It is his intention to land at an island just below Pervada. Tell me, will he carry out that intention?"

The detective shook his head in doubt.

"No," he said. "It is written in his book of fate that he will never more see India. He will never return. His reign as rajah of Bahmpoor and Matarapur is past. You, the koohnar, will be the rajah ere another month."

Nick made the prophecy very slowly, gazing intently into the eyes of his companion as he did so, and what he saw there convinced him that it would not be difficult to learn all that the koohnar knew, and that he would be easily persuaded to abandon the idea of sending an escort to the Kistna River to meet the *Howrah.*

CHAPTER VII.

"SURE, MIKE!"

"Tell me more!" demanded the koohnar, eagerly—so eagerly that the detective could with difficulty repress a smile.

"What more is there to tell, koohnar? I have told you that which you most desired to know, have I not?"

"Ay; and when you depart, you shall be loaded with presents more than you can take with you on one horse, and you shall, therefore, have two extra steeds; and whenever you shall go this way again, this palace and this estate—this entire realm will receive and honor you more than any other guest. And when I am rajah——"

"You are the rajah now, in effect. The rajah will never return."

"Ay; you are right. I am rajah now, in effect. It shall be so. But tell me more. When does he perish?"

"I have not the moment. It did not appear. Later, when the night is deep upon us and I am alone with no others to look upon the ceremony, I will burn the magic dust again. In the morning I will tell you."

"But there is more to tell, even now, is there not?"

"I saw that but lately you received a message from your kinsman, the rajah that was—for he will never more be rajah here—in which he announced that he was sailing on his vessel that is propelled by steam, for his home. I see that he told you when he would arrive and where you were to meet him with a retinue of followers, to convey him hither to his palace. Is that correct, O rajah of Bahmpoor and Matarapur?"

The koohnar blushed to the eyes at thus being addressed by the title he coveted.

"Ay," he answered. "It is correct."

"And the time of his proposed arrival was—when? I did not see that in the magic dust."

"He commanded me to meet him in person, and accompanied by twenty of the officers of his household, at the island of Oudh, in the Kistna River, near Pervada, on the sixtieth day after the receipt of the order. Twenty of those days have already elapsed, and, therefore, in forty days from now I should have been there. But now I will not go."

"Nay; you need not go. And what more said his order? His command?"

"I was to engage a special train on the railway from Guntoor to Hinganghat, which is on the opposite side of a spur of the Berar Mountains, eighty miles distant from here; and there I was to have elephants and steeds in readiness to convey him in state to the palace. But I pray you tell me more of what you see, O Nogar."

"I see that you will reign here in his stead. I see that you will reign many years in peace and prosperity. I see that you will wed with one of the most beautiful princesses of the north—from toward my own country. I see that you will raise a large family, and that the title shall de-

scend from you to your son, and to your son's son and grandsons for many generations, until it is as old as that of the great family that reigned here before your cousin succeeded to the title."

"Forever blessed be the day that brought you hither," murmured the new-made rajah, in an ecstasy of pleasure. "When, think you, may I proclaim myself the rajah?"

"On the fiftieth day from now; but not till then."

"It shall be so."

"For three days I will remain your guest, for I and my servant as well, are weary with much travel. At the end of that time I will go hence."

"Ay; and you shall have an escort; and gold; and jewels; and horses to convey the treasure that I will give you, for it is already mine to give, is it not?"

"It is that same. No other will ever claim it."

"Blessed be the day that brought you hither. I wish that you could tell me how he will perish. I would not have him suffer, even though he must die; for in dying, he leaves me the ambition of my existence and a fortune greater than that of any rajah in Hindustan."

"In the morning I will tell you. I must look again to-night."

They parted then; the rajah—for such he now called himself in secret—to pass a sleepless night over the good news he had received, and Nick to laugh with his assistant over the good fortune which had so soon supplied them with the information they sought.

But in the early morning they met again, the rajah all eagerness to know the result of the burning of the magic dust at midnight."

"Tell me," he said again, "how he perishes—and where."

"Where? You did not ask me that last night, and I did not look for it. It is sufficient that he will perish."

"Ay; that is sufficient. What matters it where?"

"What, indeed!"

"But tell me how. I would know that."

"Have you ever lingered upon the steps of the palace when the thunders of heaven were crashing above the mountain tops, and when the electric fluid has shattered trees and burned them?"

"Many times."

"It is thus that he will perish."

"By lightning?"

"By the electric fluid; yes."

"But when?"

"I may not tell you that. Fifty days from now you may proclaim yourself the rajah."

"Fifty days from now. I will wait. I will wait with patience."

"You ask nothing about the *Howrah.*"

"The *Howrah?* Ah, yes; the yacht. What of her?"

"What would you have the fate of the *Howrah* to be?"

"I have no care as to her, O seer. If she were where I could command her, I would give her to you, freely, if it were that you had uses for such a vessel."

"Then I will ask you, as the rajah of Bahmpoor and of Matarapur, to make me a deed of gift of the *Howrah* and all that she contains. Do you know that there is a treasure aboard of her, rajah?"

"Ay; in gold and jewels; but I desire none of it. I will give it all to you freely."

"Then make me such a deed of gift, in return for the service I have rendered you. Or, stay; I will draw up the deed and you shall sign it with your own name, as heir to all that Jaharazubar, one-time rajah, possesses, and as the rajah of Matarapur, also."

"But where, Nogar, will you find the vessel?"

"The magic dust told me that."

"Draw the deed and I will sign it, as you suggest."

And Nick Carter did that very thing.

It was, perhaps, not exactly legal, since the real rajah still lived; but there was nothing that could save him from his fate, and the man who made the deed was his legal heir.

On the third day after that, Nick and his assistant departed from the valley of Matarapur seated on a pair of horses such as Nick Carter had never seen before; and the detective carried in his saddlebags enough jewels that were given him by the koohnar who would so soon become the rajah, to have made him independently wealthy forever, had he not been already so.

There were diamonds, and emeralds, and rubies in the leathern bag he carried, and many of them were of great size and of remarkable purity and brilliancy.

His last words to his host were these:

"I, Nogar, the seer, go now to tour the world. I shall seek the Occident. I shall seek and I shall find the *Howrah,* and I will take possession of her. I shall, in memory of you, change her name so that hereafter she shall be known as the *Nadja;* and later, when much time has past it may be that I will visit you again and tell you of my travels."

"You will find a welcome here if I live; and if I should perish, my successor shall know of you, Nogar."

"When I know that Jaharazubar is dead, I will communicate with you."

"And I will remember to thank you in my prayers."

And so they parted.

"We have time on our hands to spare, now," said the detective to Chick, as they rode away.

"And the game is entirely in our own hands; eh?" replied Chick.

"Not so much so, possibly, as we would like to believe. We have yet to capture Carruthers and his crew;" and he added, with a smile: "In order that the prophecy may be fulfilled."

"Do you think that they will put up much of a fight?"

"If we give them half a chance they will. I don't

know that region where they are to land, and we have got to take our chances there, you see. If Carruthers has a suspicion and is at all prepared for us, look out! He isn't any easy mark."

"The inspector and Simmons ought to bring along quite a decent bunch of fellows to help us do the fighting. I don't anticipate any trouble."

"You forget one thing, Chick. There is always the possibility that something in the best-laid plans might 'gang aglee.' There are such things as typhoons in the Indian Ocean and in the Bay of Bengal; the *Alert* might encounter one of them, for this is the season of them. Suppose it should turn out that we were forced to tackle the crew of the *Howrah* single-handed—that is, you and I alone—what would you say to that?"

"I would say 'Sure, Mike!' What would you say?"

Nick rode on in silence, without replying.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SMUGGLERS OF THE ISLAND OF OUDH.

From Madras to the mouth of the Kistna River by water it is two hundred miles; by rail, the distance is almost three times as much.

It will be remembered that Nick Carter had arranged the rendezvous for the men aboard the *Alert* with himself and Chick at Madras, and that he had agreed either to meet Simmons' yacht there in person, or to send a cable or a telegram apprising Simmons of the course he was to take beyond that point.

According to the information received by the koohnar of Matarapur, the *Howrah* would not be due to arrive at the island of Oudh, in the Kistna, for something more than a month more; but the detective was well aware that it is next to impossible, on a voyage such as the *Howrah* was making, to anticipate the time of arrival at a given point with anything like exactitude.

Before leaving the palace he had spent some time in figuring upon the possibilities of both the vessels in which at that time he was so greatly interested, and the result of his cogitations and figures appeared in the next conversation on the subject that occurred between him and his assistant.

"I have been figuring on results, Chick," he said.

"On what results?" asked the assistant.

"The arrival of the two yachts on the east coast of India."

"Well, what do you make it?'

"If everything goes well with the *Alert,* she should be at Madras just about a week from to-day, and under the same conditions she may arrive a day or two earlier or later than that; but I would hardly expect her before a week from to-day."

"And what about the *Howrah?*"

"According to the message which was sent by Carruthers in the name of the rajah, she is due at the island of Oudh just thirty-eight days from now, for he ordered the escort to be there to meet him on the day following that one. Now, I figure that he would not wish his escort to be kept waiting at the place of appointment—he would rather do the waiting himself—and, therefore, he would allow plenty of margin in making that arrangement. If he should not wish to appear too soon at the island with the *Howrah,* he could easily lie on and off the coast until the fixed day; or the island of Oudh, about which I know nothing, may belong to the estate of the rajah, and there may be accommodations there for Carruthers and his friends, so that they could wait indefinitely."

"What do you make of all that, Nick?"

"This: If everything goes well with the *Howrah* on the voyage almost around the world, she is due at the mouth of the Kistna almost any time after two weeks from now."

"I see. Now, what is the result of all these figures?"

"The result is that you must go to Madras alone to meet the *Alert,* while I remain at Guntoor or Pervada to watch for the *Howrah* or the *Alert.*"

"How about that matter of you and me tackling the outfit single-handed; eh?"

"We won't take any such chances as that, Chick, unless we are forced to do it, and I hardly expect such an occasion to arise."

"All right, Nick. You're the boss. Now, what is the present order of things?"

"We are headed now for Hinganghat, where we will ship our horses aboard the same train with ourselves for Guntoor. There I will take the horses and leave the train while you will continue on to Madras. You will wait at Madras two weeks, if necessary, for the arrival of the *Alert.* If, at the end of two weeks she has not appeared, you will leave a message there for O'Brien and Simmons—and leave it in such a manner that you will be assured that it will be delivered to them immediately upon their arrival—and then return to Guntoor. Now, have you got all that clearly in your mind?"

"I have."

"I am going to keep these horses, Chick, and take them back home with us to New York."

"Sure thing."

"I never saw a pair of such beautiful animals in my life."

"Nor I."

The program as outlined by the detective was carried out to the letter, and at Guntoor the detectives separated, Chick continuing on the way to Madras, while Nick left the train, and still arrayed in the disguise he had worn since leaving Akola, he took lodgings at a small inn among the outskirts of the city.

The following morning he mounted one of the horses

and rode to the river, several miles distant, and there he readily found a boatman who agreed to take him to the island of Oudh for a fee, and shortly before noon he stepped ashore upon what appeared to be a barren mass of rocks which jutted high out of the river, more than a mile from the shore on either side.

At first glance, as he approached it, the island seemed to include twenty or thirty acres in area, and to be entirely bare, and, therefore, uninhabited; and when he questioned the boatman about it, that individual shook his head mysteriously and vouchsafed nothing whatever in reply.

All this impressed Nick as rather strange.

Once ashore, he ordered the boatman to await him, and then began to climb the rocks toward the center of the island.

And here, when he arrived at a pinnacle, a surprise awaited him.

The interior of the island was shaped not unlike a deep saucer, and in the very center of the depression stood a large, but low, stone building which had the outward appearance of a fortress, save for the fact that it was in a depression and not at all situated as a building erected for defensive operations should have been.

But there was not a sign of life anywhere about the place, and Nick, for reasons of his own, deemed it wise not to investigate any further at that time.

However, he remained on the pinnacle long enough to take a careful survey of the island, so that when he should visit it again, whether in the dark or in the light, he would know his way over the ground as well as the most likely approaches to the strange-looking house.

Then he returned to the boat and directed that he be taken to the mainland again.

Out in the middle of the river he signed for the boatman to cease paddling, and then he took two gold pieces from his pocket and exhibited them to the man, whose eyes glistened with cupidity.

Gold did not often enter into the list of his possessions, and Nick could observe a twitching of the muscles of his face as he looked upon them.

"I haven't a doubt that you would cheerfully murder me for less than that," he said, in English, which, of course, the man did not comprehend at all; and then, in Hindustanee, he added:

"If you will truthfully reply to all the questions I shall ask you, I will give these two gold pieces to you."

"I will truthfully reply to the sahib," was the instant reply, given calmly, but still with lustful gaze fixed upon the coins.

"Who owns that island?" was the first question.

"The rajah of Bahmpoor," was the instant reply.

"Of Bahmpoor and Matarapur; eh?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Who lives there now?"

"The koohnar of the island and his helpers."

"How many are there all together?"

The boatman held up both hands without replying.

"Do you mean ten?" asked the detective.

"Yes, sahib."

"What do they do? Why do they live there? What is their occupation?"

"There are rumors, sahib, but nothing is positively known."

"What are the rumors?"

"I can reply to that question best by telling you something concerning the rajah."

"Very well, tell me."

"Before he inherited the title to Bahmpoor, the rajah was a sailor. He was also engaged in the manufacture of silks, as well as other things. Also he purchased many commodities of that kind and other kinds from other manufacturers."

"I begin to understand."

"Although he purchased very extensively, he was never known to sell; nevertheless, his storehouses were never full.

"On the opposite side of the island there is a harbor; an indentation into the shore large enough to accommodate a large vessel. Ships that sail and ships that are propelled by steam arrive and depart at intervals, and it is thought that when they go away they take with them the stores which are kept there, for when they depart they are laden, and when they arrive they are high in the water. Nobody knows from whence they come or whither they go."

"In a word, they are smugglers."

"I have not made use of the word, sahib; I beg that you will remember that."

"Oh, I won't forget it. Nobody shall be aware that I have talked with you on this subject at all. Tell me where that harbor is located that you just referred to."

"It is directly opposite to the spot where we landed."

"And is it easily found?"

"The entrance to it is rather narrow. There are two high rocks, one on either hand as you go in. Otherwise it is easy of access."

"Do you know if there happens to be a ship of any description there at the present time?"

"There has been no vessel there at all for the last six months, sahib. It is said that the rajah is traveling in other countries, and that all business has been suspended until his return."

"And is it known when he will return?"

"It is known to me when he is expected to return. To me and to the men on the island, but to no others. It was I who took the message to the island when it arrived, and I heard the men to whom I delivered it discussing it."

"Tell me about it."

"There have been two messages. The last one came only four days ago."

"Well?"

The boatman began to count on his fingers, and Nick watched him narrowly, counting with him until he reached as high as seventeen, when he ceased.

"There will be seventeen days yet before the *Howrah* is expected to arrive at the island," he said, calmly.

"You are sure that you are correct about that?"

"Yes, sahib."

"Seventeen days, beginning the count with to-day?"

"Yes. There were twenty-one; four of them are past; therefore there are still seventeen."

"Now," said Nick, "if you were to visit the island after nightfall, and wished to get inside the building that is there, without letting it be known to the people who live there, how would you accomplish it?"

A gleam of cunning came into the eyes of the boatman. He looked at the gold pieces in the detective's hand, and then into Nick's eyes as he replied, slowly:

"Does the sahib expect all that information for two pieces of gold?"

For answer Nick placed two more gold pieces beside the others.

"You shall have four," he said, "for the information, now; and after that, if you will put yourself under my orders, keep silent and be ready when I ask you to guide me there, you shall have twenty more—after you have done the job for me. What say you? And as an earnest that I mean what I say, take these four pieces now."

The boatman accepted them with unabated dignity.

"Is it agreed?" asked the detective.

"It is agreed, sahib."

"And can you do it?"

"I can do it, sahib."

"And you will do it?"

"I will."

"Then one thing more. You have a house somewhere near the river, where you live, I suppose. You shall take me there to live with you until the arrival of the *Howrah*, and for that I will pay you a gold piece extra for each day that I remain with you."

CHAPTER IX.

A MOST DESPERATE FIGHT.

On the morning of the fifteenth day after the foregoing conversation, Chick arrived from Madras, and, having been apprised of Nick's change of address, went at once to the boatman's house, near the shore of the river, where he found the detective.

"The *Alert* is on her way from Madras," was his welcome greeting. "I left there last night, and she departed about the same time. The distance is much shorter by water, and Simmons intended to time the yacht so that she would be here some time this evening."

"Then everything is as it should be. The game is almost played, Chick. We will take Mr. Maitland Carruthers back to New York, as well as the crew that is with him to answer for all the crimes they have committed; we will take the *Howrah*, but we will hereafter call her the *Nadja;* we will take the two horses given to us at Matarapur, and——"

"And we will probably have the fight of our lives to do it, too; eh?"

"More than likely."

The *Alert* arrived on schedule time, and she was taken into the north arm of the mouth of the Kistna River and anchored there, where she would be out of sight from the decks of the *Howrah*, should that vessel chance to arrive before the time she was expected to appear.

On board the vessel, in addition to the regular crew and Simmons, O'Brien, Ten-Ichi and Patsy, there were fifteen well-armed and thoroughly determined men, all of whom had gladly enlisted in the undertaking, each one glad of the opportunity for the voyage and delighted to be associated with Inspector O'Brien and Nick Carter in any adventure they might choose to undertake.

Thus, all told, the detective had fifty men under his command, and he did not doubt the outcome of the adventure.

On the second afternoon after the arrival of the *Alert*, Nick called his friends aside.

"The *Howrah* has not shown up yet," he said to them, collectively, "but she is likely to appear now at any moment. Our boatman is ready to guide us to the castle on the island, and I propose that we make the expedition to-night."

"Why?" asked Simmons. "Why make two bites of a cherry?"

"Because we will have about a hundred per cent. in our favor if we have possession of the island and the men who are stationed there, before the arrival of Carruthers and his crew."

"It is a corking good idea," said the inspector. "We'll do it."

Accordingly, just a little before midnight that night, twenty of the party put off from the shore for the island.

The night was a black one. There was not even a star to be seen, and it was only when the boats were quite near to the pile of rocks which formed the island that the black mass of it could be discerned.

Nick's native boatman acted as guide for the party, and they pulled entirely around the island to the opposite side and glided in silently through the narrow opening of the small bay that he had described to the detective.

In silence they landed on the shore; in silence a rope was stretched from hand to hand until it extended from

the native boatman, who led them by the right path, to the last man of the party.

Then a slight tug upon the line given by Nick Carter, who was directly behind the boatman, apprised the others that the march had begun, and in utter silence they made their way up the steep ascent and over the brow of the hill, thence down toward the castle-like structure in the slump of the saucer-shaped depression.

The boatman seemed to know his ground thoroughly.

He conducted the party almost to the walls of the building; then he skirted the low structure to the right, and at last paused.

Nick could determine that the man was feeling about the wall in search of something, and at last heard him utter a grunt of satisfaction; then he turned and seized the detective and pulled him down so that he could whisper in his ear.

"It is no part of our bargain that I am expected to take part in the fighting, is it?" he asked.

"No; you are merely to guide us to the spot where the fighting is to take place—if the men in that house are capable of putting up a fight."

"They will fight, sahib. They will fight like demons. They fight with the knife, the creese and the dagger; never with the pistol. When the fighting begins, I will vanish."

"And when will you appear again?"

"When the fighting is over—if you win; not at all if you lose."

"And where shall I find you when I want you?"

"You will have no need to find me, sahib, if you win the fight; for in that case I will find you."

"Very good. Lead on. But first, where are you taking us?"

"To the great hall of the house. It is the assembly room where the men eat and drink, and play at games. It covers the entire width of the building. From that room, also, there are doors which open upon the sleeping rooms of the men. Once in the great room, with two or three of your men stationed at the corridors I have mentioned, there will be no possibility of escape for any of the ten men who are in the house."

"Are you sure that there are only ten men there?"

"Yes, sahib; I am positive of that."

"Very well; lead on."

They entered the building seemingly through an opening in the solid wall, and ten minutes later they emerged upon the room that the boatman had described.

A small wick, passed through a cork, floated upon a basin filled with oil upon a table in the center of the great room, which was more than fifty feet in extent both ways, and as this wick was burning, although it showed not more than a mere spark of fire in the darkness, it still served to dispel the utter blackness of the passageway through which the men had arrived, and coming as they did out of intense darkness, they were enabled to see objects with considerable distinctness.

The twenty men filed into the great room in silence, and by direction of the detective, eight of them were stationed at the entrances—four at each one of the corridors already described.

The doors opening upon the room referred to by the guide were easily discernible, and Nick, having stationed the body of his men near the middle of the room in a circle, so that they faced toward every approach, selected four of his followers, and silently approached one of these doors, which was nearest to the corridor through which they had entered.

The door opened easily, and as Nick passed through it in advance of the others, he flashed the light from his pocket lantern from one side of the sleeping room to the other.

As he did so, the man who was stretched upon the cot in the room, leaped to his feet and at the same time uttered a yell which might have been heard half a mile away, and which rang through the building as a shout of warning to his companions.

As he uttered the call of alarm, he sprang toward the detective, and it must have been that he had gone to rest with his creese in the bed beside him, for it was already in his grasp, held high in the air, and as he leaped forward he struck with it.

If the blow had fallen where it was directed, there is no doubt that the detective's head would have been severed from his body by that one stroke; but Nick Carter was not the sort of a fighter that is so easily overcome.

As the blow fell, he leaped backward just far enough to avoid it, and then, before the man with the creese could recover from the force of his own momentum, the detective leaped forward and seized him around the body.

But the half-naked Malay—for such he proved to be—was as slippery as an eel, and he writhed out of the detective's grasp with a suddenness and ease that was astonishing.

With the same motion he seemed to recover his equilibrium also.

Again the creese was raised and again it descended.

This time, instead of leaping back to avoid it, the detective darted under the blow; and this time also he seized his opponent in a firmer grasp; for, being obliged to stoop low in order to avoid the weapon, he had no opportunity to strike the man with his fist.

But the same purpose was accomplished.

Nick lifted the Malay in his arms as if he had been a child, and then, bending slightly back, he threw him so that he sailed over the detective's head, just as an athlete "puts" a round shot behind him.

The boatswain of the *Alert* happened to be the man who was behind Nick. He was a large, brawny Irishman, and when he saw the body of the Malay flying to-

ward him through the air, he met the fellow's face halfway with one of his huge fists.

The impact was something worth recording.

The noise of it might have been heard across that great room outside, had there been silence elsewhere in the building.

But it did for the Malay.

He went to the stone floor like a bag of meal, and he remained there, quivering like an ox that has been struck by the slaughterer's mallet.

In the meantime other things were happening.

That yell of warning had awakened the entire household, and as if with one impulse they had leaped from their beds and rushed into the great room.

They were armed, too, as the Malay was.

They held creeses in their right hands, and many of them had ugly looking daggers in the grasp of the other hand.

Nick Carter afterward said of the fight that followed that it was the one and only time in his experience when the odds in numbers were on his side, and that he needed every man he had with him, at that.

The guide had not been mistaken when he announced that these men would fight like demons.

They did that very thing; and they possessed the snake-like quality of squirming free from any grasp that fell upon them.

They were nine against twenty, and but for that fact, many would have been killed on each side, and, as it was, there were a number of severe wounds taken and given by both.

All the while they were fighting, the Malays kept up a terrific din of yelling, until it seemed as if there were hundreds fighting in that room, instead of a little more than a score, for already many were down and bleeding on both sides.

Before the fight commenced, in fact, before they entered the building at all, Nick had given specific orders that no matter what happened, not a man of them was to be permitted to escape from the buildings. His own men were told to avoid killing outright, if possible, but to win the fight, and, at the same time, prevent an escape at all hazards.

There was one tall and brawny smuggler in the group who seemed to be the leader, and he fought with a fierceness, and strength, and agility which had already sent three of the detective's followers to the floor with ugly wounds when Nick Carter fought his way to him and faced him in person.

He seemed to recognize in Nick the leader of the attacking party, and, with a yell of rage and defiance, he hurled himself upon the detective.

As yet no revolvers had been used, and Nick had seized a creese from one of the men he had overcome, so that when he faced the leader they were evenly matched, for their weapons were the same.

The Malay rushed toward Nick, swinging his creese and aiming at the detective's throat, which is the favorite stroke with that weapon.

This time, however, it fell short of its mark, for Nick easily parried the blow, and then, with a lightning-like curve of his arm, aimed a return stroke at his opponent.

That was parried as deftly as the detective had done it, and, after that, blow after blow fell on either side, one after another in quick succession, until Nick Carter, feeling that the Malay was a better master of that peculiar weapon than he was, stepped back and hurled it with all his strength at the other man.

It turned about as it flew through the air, and the handle or hilt of it struck the Malay straight between the eyes, knocking him flat upon the floor, senseless.

It was the last blow delivered in that fight, for, as Nick looked around him, he saw that the ten smugglers were accounted for, and that those who were able to move had been bound and rendered helpless.

CHAPTER X.

NICK CARTER'S LITTLE SCHEME.

No sooner was the fight finished and the detective and his followers in full possession of the place than the boatman guide appeared suddenly and silently beside Nick.

"Well, sahib," he inquired, placidly, "are there any orders for me?"

The detective could not resist a smile at the naïveness of the man; and he replied:

"Yes; you can lend us some assistance in the dressing of the wounds that have been given and taken by my men." Then he turned to Simmons, who was also unhurt.

"Miron," he said, "there is work for you to do now."

"What—more? Is there any more scrapping on hand?"

"Not just at the present moment, but I want you to take two or three of the men who are unhurt, and as soon as day breaks, drop down the river to the *Alert*. I want her brought here, into this harbor."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied Simmons, smiling. "It shall be done. Say, Nick, that was a beautiful scrap, wasn't it?"

"Pretty fair."

"I give you my word, I never enjoyed anything so much in my life before."

"And you had to come all the way to India to get it. That was rather tough on you."

"Huh! I'd go around the world twice for just such another time as that one."

"You may have one that will beat it all hollow, and that without traveling very far to get it, either."

"You mean when the *Howrah* gets here?"

"Yes; that is what I mean."

"Rats! Those chaps on board the *Howrah* won't put up such a fight as these devils did."

"Possibly not; but there will be a great many more of them."

"We will whip them, just the same."

"Oh, I haven't a doubt of that; but I think we will have to use a little strategy."

"What is your scheme? Are you going to wait here for them to come ashore on the island?"

"I had thought of doing that—with some corrections and qualifications."

"But if we bring the *Alert* inside that little harbor, she will be seen the moment the *Howrah* arrives. Won't that act as a warning to them and render our task the harder?"

"It would if it happened just that way. You did not know that I came over here a few nights ago when it was not so dark, and made a careful study of the harbor, did you?"

"No."

"Well, I did; and I found that there is a place inside the gate of the harbor where the water puts back into the cliff far enough to afford a place for the *Alert* to hide; that is, she will be hidden sufficiently so that men on board another craft which might enter there, would not and could not discover her until they were well past her, and then——"

"Then the discovery would be too late to do them any good."

"Exactly; but I have an idea that we will capture the *Howrah* before she enters this harbor."

"You mean to go out to sea and attack her there?"

"Not at all."

"What, then?"

"I figure the thing out in this way: Carruthers is far too cautious a man to sail boldly into this harbor without first finding out what the conditions are. You must remember that if my surmises are correct, he is at this moment disguised as the rajah and that he means to continue to play that part for an indefinite time; as long as it suits his purpose to do so, in fact."

"There is no doubt of that in my mind."

"He intends to absorb all the millions possessed by the rajah. To do that, he will play the part of the rajah until he has rid himself of all the people about him who might ever have the wit to see through the disguise and discover his real identity."

"And after that?"

"After that, if he should succeed in carrying out his plans, he will continue to play the rajah, perhaps for years, but remaining most of the time away from his estates here. I can imagine nothing that he would enjoy more than the taking of trips to London and Paris as the rajah of Matarapur and spending the rajah's money like water."

"Well, what is the game you propose to play to head him off in all that?"

"Wait till I finish with what I think he will do first upon the arrival of the *Howrah* in this river."

"Go ahead."

"If he were in reality the rajah—or, rather, if the real rajah were aboard the *Howrah,* he would sail directly into the harbor at this island and come ashore in person, expecting to find his men overjoyed to receive him.

"Being Carruthers, he does not know these men at all, and he would be more than likely to betray himself to one or more of them the moment he set foot in this house."

"That is as true as you live. I had not even thought of that."

"It is extremely doubtful if he knows the names of any of these men we have captured, so, don't you see, that he will not dare to sail in here until he has investigated, and prepared the way?"

"I see it now."

"That is why the *Alert* will be safer here than elsewhere. She might be seen where she is now anchored."

"You are right, Nick, as you always are."

"In fact, it would not surprise me if the *Howrah* should seek the very anchorage where the *Alert* now is, and that would spring things on us a little too soon."

"Sure."

"Now, it is always well to suppose a case, and in doing so to pick out the most likely one for the suppositions."

"You are a crackerjack at that sort of thing, Nick, but I am not. I'm just a little pupil from the primary class sitting at your feet to learn, you know."

"Let us suppose, then, that the *Howrah* will seek the anchorage behind the island at the mouths of the river where the *Alert* now is. Once there, Carruthers will send to this island an order for the men whom he supposes are stationed here, to go aboard the *Howrah.*"

"By Jove, Nick, that is the idea! And when they came aboard, he would gobble the whole lot, one by one; eh?"

"Yes; have them sent into the cabin in details of two or three, and overpowered there. After that was done, he could make his own terms with them, and if they refused to agree to the terms he offered, it would be a very simple matter to silence them forever, and he would not hesitate to do it."

"Well, then what?"

"Why, then he would come to the island, take possession and await the arrival of the escort, which he expects will be sent to meet him from Matarapur. It is all very simple, the way he has figured it out."

"It certainly sounds so."

"His orders by cable directed that the one man at Matarapur whom he fears the most is to meet him here in person. Depend upon it, he intends to put the koohnar into a dungeon so deep that he would never have shown up out of it alive if I had not stopped his coming."

"Now, tell me what your game is to checkmate Carruthers and get possession of the *Howrah*, will you?"

"I am going to make an effort to get possession of Carruthers first, and the *Howrah* afterward."

"Eh? Do you mean that you are going to try to take Carruthers off the *Howrah* before making the attempt to capture her?"

"That is exactly what I mean."

"Then you had better take Jared Clarke at the same time."

"Think so?"

"He's a bad one, Nick; as bad as they make 'em."

"I'll think about it."

"How are you going to do it?"

"I don't know yet, and I won't be able to decide until the *Howrah* arrives."

"Is it your game to board her in secret before the general attack is made?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Say, Nick, look here; I have always been a good friend of yours, haven't I?"

"Sure thing."

"If you asked a favor of me you would know beforehand that it would be granted, if possible, wouldn't you?"

"Yes; I think I would."

"Then take me with you when you do that thing; will you?"

Nick laughed aloud.

"I wasn't quite expecting that request," he said.

"Will you do it?"

"I'll think about it."

"Don't think about it; answer me now."

"All right; you shall go, even if I have to ask you to wait outside when I go aboard the yacht."

"But how are you going to get aboard of her?"

"I shall probably climb aboard of her in the usual way."

"But how? I don't understand."

"Why, I shall simply make up as one of these fellows we have just captured, and then I will have our boatman take me to the *Howrah*. If you go with me you will have to be changed into one of those fellows, also. The only danger of that is that you cannot speak the lingo, and if a question happened to be addressed to you, you could not reply."

"I could be deaf and dumb."

The detective shook his head.

"I'm afraid that wouldn't work," he said.

"By thunder, I'd make it work somehow! You are not going to flunk on your promise, are you, Nick?"

"No, indeed. When I start, you shall go with me."

"And, say! If you will take me aboard the *Howrah* with you, I'll tackle Clarke while you do for his nibs; how's that?"

"It wouldn't work at all, Simmons. If I capture Carruthers at all, it must be done so silently and expeditiously that the fact of it will not be known. If I succeed in taking him off the *Howrah*, I must do it so secretly that not another man aboard that craft will have an idea that it has been done."

"Do you think it will be possible?"

"If I did not think so I would not make the effort."

"And I am to go with you. That is settled, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"We will start for the island which separates the two mouths of the river as soon as you have brought the *Alert* safely into the harbor here, and anchored her."

"And I am to start at daylight?"

"You can start at once, if you like. The boatman will take you."

"That settles it. I start in ten minutes. Where is that chap, the guide?"

Nick called to him and gave him the necessary orders, at which he merely nodded, and then stood waiting for Simmons to start.

And a few moments later they were out on the river, hurrying down with the tide toward the place where the *Alert* was anchored.

"You should be back here about an hour after daylight," was Nick's last word to Simmons. "As soon as you return, we will start after Carruthers."

"And Clarke," replied Simmons, with a grin. "He's my meat, Nick."

CHAPTER XI.

AN ATTACK IN THE DARK.

It was a night that was saturated with a driving mist when the *Howrah* came through the lower, or southern mouth of the river, and made her way slowly around to the very spot where the detective had believed she would anchor, for a time at least.

It is true that she arrived just before darkness had finally settled over that part of the earth, but by the time her anchor rested at the bottom of the river, black night was upon them.

Nick Carter and Simmons, at their chosen place of waiting on the low, marshy island which separates the two mouths of the river, saw her as she made her way slowly past, and if she had not been expected it is doubtful if the detective would have recognized her, so changed was she by a coat of white paint.

But the rakish attitude of her masts and funnels, and her general appearance other than that of color, was the same, and both men knew her almost at once.

It was the boatman who discovered her first, for it was his turn to watch at the outlook, where, since they encamped on the island, each had taken his turn, so that not a moment was left unguarded, for Nick did not intend that the vessel should slip past him without his knowledge.

"Now you have got her here, what are you going to do about it?" asked Simmons, with some facetiousness, when they returned to their camp after watching the yacht while she went to anchor.

"I am going to do exactly as I said I would," replied the detective.

"When are you going to make the attempt?"

"There is no time like the present. I am going aboard to-night."

"Do I go with you?"

"No; you remain here where you are."

"Aw, say, Nick, that isn't living up to your bargain."

"My dear Miron, a good general always lays out his campaign before he embarks upon it, and to-night I am merely going to study my route and make my plans."

"Can't I go in the boat with you?"

"I'm not going in the boat."

"What in the world are you going to do? Swim out to her?"

"Just that."

"The crocodiles will eat you up. The river is full of them."

"They are all asleep in the mud at the bottom of the river by this time, Simmons."

"Well, the sharks, then. I have seen hundreds of them since we have been here."

"So have I; but sharks do not feed at night."

"Something will get you, as sure as shooting."

"I don't think so; anyhow, I'm going."

And go he did.

From a point on the shore directly abreast of the place where the *Howrah* was anchored, Nick waited until he heard six bells of the night watch—eleven o'clock—strike aboard the yacht, and then, after grasping Simmons and also the boatman by the hand, he slipped silently into the water and swam away through the darkness, disappearing almost at once, for so dark was the night and so thick was the almost impenetrable mist, that it was impossible to discover him from the shore two minutes after he was in the water.

Simmons had not spoken idly when he referred to the crocodiles and sharks, nor had Nick been technically exact when he stated that the crocodiles were all asleep and that sharks did not feed at night.

However. he did not fear them, and, more than that, he was in a measure prepared for them.

In the belt that was strapped around his waist he carried two revolvers loaded with waterproof shells, and between his teeth he held a long, Malay, two-edged dagger, ready for instant use.

The distance from the shore to the yacht was short, and he really did not fear attack from any of the monsters of the deep.

Nor did he receive one.

He arrived at the side of the vessel without incident, and from there he swam to the anchor chain.

It was the work of only a moment for him to make his way to the deck from there, and after discovering that the watch on duty was already asleep abaft the chart house, he glided past him and made his way aft toward the cabin.

The watch amidships was also dozing, and Nick had no difficulty in passing him unseen.

"This is dead easy," he thought, with a grim smile, as he approached the companion way. "I only hope that the rest of it will be no more difficult than this has been thus far."

The interior of the *Howrah* was perfectly well known to the detective, for it was aboard of her that he once arrested Carruthers and the real rajah of Matarapur after a most desperate encounter with them and the then officers of the yacht.*

He was, therefore, not working on unknown ground, and in this there was, of course, a great advantage.

The detective had stained his entire body a dark brown before setting out on this expedition, and as he was naked save for swimming trunks about his loins he appeared like a deeper shadow in the darkness that surrounded him.

At the entrance to the cabin he paused, and waited and listened, and hearing nothing, he was on the point of entering, when he fancied that he caught the murmur of voices from a point further aft.

Feeling assured of this, he glided on again, and presently came to the door of the smoking room which opened directly off the deck.

The door was ajar, as were also the windows, and a light shone out of them.

Fearing that he might be discovered if he happened to pass into one of those rays of light, or between one of them and some person further forward on the yacht, he dropped to his belly on the deck and squirmed forward after a fashion that would have made his Indian guide green with envy, and which rendered it utterly impossible that he should be seen.

When he arrived at a point that was directly beneath one of the open windows, he raised himself slowly, first to his knees and then to his feet, and presently, having brought his left eye into a position which enabled him to see past one corner of the window, he discovered that there were two men in the smoking room and that they were Carruthers and Clarke.

They were seated at a table in the middle of the room, and their positions were such that neither of them faced the window where the detective was concealed.

Both sat so that the sides of their faces were toward the detective, and it was apparent at once that they were engaged in an earnest conversation.

All of this Nick could hear, and he smiled with satisfaction when he discovered that the prognostication he had made in his talk with Simmons was correct.

"I tell you, Clarke," Carruthers was saying, "that my life wouldn't be worth a moment's purchase if I should present myself at the house on Oudh Island. Those Malays are regular dyed-in-the-wool devils. I have heard Jaharazubar say so. They would get onto me in a minute, and what sort of a show would I have?"

"Mighty little, I suppose."

"My way is the best. I will send a command to the island for every mother's son of them to show up aboard this yacht to-morrow, and then, if they are cranky, they will go to feed the sharks; that is all there is about that."

"Suppose they should refuse to come?"

Carruthers shrugged his shoulders, was silent a moment, and then replied:

"I don't think they will do that."

"The trouble is that we haven't got a native aboard to take the message. If we had one of them to send, it would be different."

"I can get around that, all right. There is a native boatman who lives on the shore just across the island to the south. I know who he is, what his name is and where to find him. He would sell his soul for a few rupees. I will have one of the men take me there in the launch as soon as it is light in the morning. I'll bring the fellow back here, and I'll make him represent himself as one of the crew, and fill him full of a lot of lies to tell the islanders, so that they will have no hesitation in coming."

"Well, maybe your way is the best; but if I had mine, I would steam up there, and go right into the harbor you have described, the first thing in the morning."

"Well, I wouldn't. Suppose, for instance, that the rajah has escaped from prison? Or, suppose that even if he has not escaped, that he has heard about the taking of the *Howrah* from the basin?"

"Well, what of it?"

"This of it. He would know in a minute that it was I who did it, for he must know of my escape, and knowing that, he also knows me well enough to guess at once

*For particulars, see No. 456 of the NICK CARTER Series, entitled "The Rajah's Revenge."

that I would come right here and play the rajah until I had got possession of all his wealth. Don't you suppose that, knowing that, he would find a way somehow to cable to the koohnar at Matarapur?"

"Well?"

"Well? Do you have to ask that? Don't you know what would be the result in such a case, Clarke?"

"No; what would be the result?"

"The koohnar is a cousin to the rajah; he expects to inherit the title and estates, and there is nothing on earth or in heaven that he so much desires. If he received such a message as I have described, from the rajah, he is now waiting on Oudh Island for me to arrive, and you and I and all the others would be put to death before we had time to take two whiffs at a breath. You leave the thing to me."

"All right. You are the boss, anyhow."

"You are right I am."

"You think you will start after that boatman at daylight?"

"Yes; or before that, possibly, if this mist clears away. He will know whether there are any strangers on the island or not. I wish to see him as soon as possible."

"Then I'll say good-night now. I want to turn in, for I'm tired; and you won't see me before you leave in the morning, either. Daylight is a trifle too early for me."

"Lie in bed till noon, if you wish; that is about the time I will return."

"Will you bring that boatman here with you?"

"I shall probably send him directly to the island and instruct him to come here from there after he has done the errand."

"All right. Good-night."

They parted then, Clarke going below to turn in, as he had said, and Carruthers remaining where he was; and as soon as Clarke had disappeared, Carruthers, after lighting a fresh cigar, laughed aloud and then uttered his thoughts in the same manner.

"Poor fool!" he muttered, evidently referring to his late companion. "I wonder if you suppose that I am silly enough to be hampered by you all the rest of my life? It seems that you do. But, oh! no, my amiable friend and liberator; your time is growing short. If all is clear for me on the island, I shall search for and find a very comfortable spot for your burial."

He ceased to speak aloud then, but it was already determined how he purposed rewarding the man who had aided in his escape from prison for that service.

For a long time after that Carruthers sat as still as if he were sleeping, and, indeed, it might have been supposed that he was asleep had it not been for the intermittent clouds of tobacco smoke that issued from between his lips.

The detective, watching him, wondered if, after all, the present were not the best opportunity he would have to carry out his own purpose of capturing the pseudo rajah.

Then, as if fate were playing into the detective's hands, Carruthers rose suddenly from his chair and came out upon the deck, barely allowing the detective time enough to flatten his body in a deep shadow where it would not be seen.

But Carruthers passed him with his head high in the air, absorbed in his own thoughts so deeply that he seemed to look neither to one side of him nor the other.

He walked directly aft and did not pause until his body was plump against the taffrail.

Nothing could have been better for the purpose of the detective, and Nick decided to act at once.

Carruthers was standing with his back toward the detective. He was looking off into the darkness and the mist that hung over the river, and doubtless he was dreaming of the power he would sway, the wealth he would possess and the good times he was to enjoy when once he had established himself firmly as the rajah.

He did not know that directly behind him a figure was stealing slowly and stealthily upon him, with each second approaching nearer and nearer.

He could not have imagined that the one man on earth whom he most feared was at that very instant within a few feet of him, and that with every succeeding instant he was coming closer.

He could not guess that presently there would be a sudden dash; that he would feel an iron grip around his throat, and that, strong and heavy as he was, he would be raised from the deck and hurled into the water as if he were a child.

That Nick Carter was in India was the least of Carruthers' expectations.

The detective had reached the spot he desired on the deck behind his intended victim.

He gathered himself for the onslaught, and then, with every muscle he possessed strained to its utmost tension, he made the leap.

Nothing human could have withstood that impact.

The detective bounded into the air silently, and the

first intimation that Carruthers had of the presence near him of another person was when Nick Carter alighted on his shoulders, and he felt that terrible grip of the detective's fingers upon his throat while at the same time Nick's free hand was clapped down across the villain's mouth, effectually closing it and thus preventing any outcry.

And then the very thing upon which the detective counted happened.

His own weight upon Carruthers shoulders, and the force of the impact from the jump, threw the man off his balance.

For just one instant he struggled vainly to save himself from going over the rail; but it was in vain, and the next, he toppled over, with Nick still on top of him and clinging to him, and thus they fell with a loud splash into the water together.

But never for an instant did the detective release the steellike grip he had on Carruthers' throat, while at the same time he clung with his legs around his victim's body, thus effectually preventing Carruthers from making use of his own strength in his defense.

Even in the excitement of the moment, Nick Carter wondered if the noise of the splash made when they fell into the water would alarm the men on the *Howrah;* but he continued to choke his man, just the same, until they were far down toward the bottom of the river, when he suddenly released the pressure on the larynx, with the result that a flood of water rushed into Carruthers' mouth, which did more to choke him into insensibility than did the grip of the detective.

Then Nick kicked the bottom soundly with his feet, with the result that they shot to the surface of the water at once; and with Carruthers, now totally unconscious, supported upon one arm, the detective struck out for the shore, noticing as he did so that there was no stir aboard the vessel, and, therefore, that Carruthers' mishap had not been discovered.

CHAPTER XII.

A TRAGEDY OF THE SEA.

With powerful strokes, although swimming with one hand and supporting the heavy weight of Maitland Carruthers with the other, the detective made his way rapidly toward the shore at the spot where he had left Simmons, and where he knew he would be awaiting his return.

He had covered two-thirds of the distance and it only required a few minutes more to arrive at the land, when a shadowy substance darted past the two men in the water, and Nick saw a flash of white through the mists as the shark turned its belly upward to seize the prey it sought.

Hampered as he was, the detective knew that it would be impossible to put up a good fight against the monster of the deep, and so instead of turning to await its second attack, as he would have done had he been alone—for that would have been decidedly the safer method—he redoubled his exertions to gain the shallow water near the shore.

But he was not quick enough to escape the shark at that.

In another moment it was upon them the second time, and Nick wheeled to face it as the monster dashed toward them, belly upward, and with its wide jaws distended, ready to snap at anything which came in their way.

As it shot forward like an arrow from a bow, Nick struck out with his huge knife, and he succeeded in burying it to the hilt in the belly of the shark.

But even that did not prevent the terrible jaws from snapping together, and Nick felt that a convulsive shudder passed through the body of Carruthers at the same instant.

But he did not know what had happened until after he had reached the shore and Simmons, with the aid of the boatman, had pulled them both out of the water.

"Quick!" exclaimed the detective. "Take him by the feet. It is Carruthers. We must get him to our camp and then into our boat and make tracks for Oudh. We have no time to lose."

Simmons sought to obey, but as he leaned over to do as he was told, he suddenly straightened himself again.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "One of his feet is missing. It is gone!"

Nick dropped the head and shoulders to the ground and hurried to investigate.

It was only too true. The shark which had already received its death wound from the knife in the detective's hand, had taken immedite revenge, for it had bitten Carruthers' right leg clean off, midway between the knee and the foot.

"Rip off your shirt, quick!" Nick called to Simmons; and in another moment he had improvised a ligature with which he succeeded in stopping the bleeding.

With that done, some brandy from Simmons' flask

was poured down Carruthers' throat, and then, still unconscious, he was carried to the boat.

* * * * * * *

When Carruthers returned to consciousness, he was in a place he had least desired to visit without first making due preparation therefor; in a word, he was inside the great room of the house on Oudh Island.

But it was not that which amazed him the most; it was the fact that the face that was close to him while its owner bent over him, belonged to Nick Carter.

His first remark was characteristic. It was:

"So, Carter, you have beat me again, have you?"

"Yes; once again. Are you suffering any now, Carruthers?"

"I don't know but I am, now that you speak of it. What is the matter with my voice? And why does my foot pain me so? I am very weak."

In as few words and as concisely as possible, Nick related to him all that had happened from the moment of the attack; and Carruthers listened grimly, with never a comment until Nick had finished.

"I give up, Carter," he said then. "I shall never try to fight you again, even if I live through this. But you had better capture the *Howrah* and take the whole bunch back with you, for if you do not, they will seize the vessel and make a pirate of her."

"I have already planned to do that," replied the detective. "The boatman about whom you and Clarke were talking last night is already in my employ. I shall send him to the *Howrah* with a message purporting to come from you, telling them to come to the island, to anchor outside in the river, and to come ashore in the boats, leaving only a few on board. Thus we will capture them easily and without more bloodshed."

Carruthers nodded.

"It is a good plan," he said, "and it will work if you take this ring, and send your message to Clarke. He is second in command. He is captain when I am away. This ring is an agreed signal between us. I don't want to leave him here, now that I'm out of the game; and I should have killed him, anyhow."

Thus Carruthers betrayed his companions at the last moment when even an ordinary criminal would have stood by his pals.

The ring was an opal set with diamonds, and half an hour later Nick, disguised as a Malay and accompanied by the boatman guide, started for the *Howrah*.

They arrived at the time Carruthers had told Clarke to expect him—at noon—and while the detective remained in the small boat, the boatman went on deck and delivered his message—or attempted to do so, for no one there could understand him; but at last he pointed toward Nick, in the boat, and uttered the one word: "Inglis."

Then Nick, in exceedingly broken English, delivered the message so that it was understood, and the exhibition of the opal ring did the rest; and thirty minutes later the small boat, with Nick still inside it, was being towed up the river toward Oudh Island, while the boatman acted as pilot on the yacht.

There seems to be very little more to tell of this story.

There was some trouble during the capture of the crew of the *Howrah* when they were induced to go ashore and enter the house on the island; but there was none that was really worth the name of a fight.

During one of the little scraps Simmons managed to get a beautiful black eye and a cut lip, and he was very proud of both.

The inspector came near to the end of his days when he tackled Clarke, too, for that half-fledged pirate pulled a revolver from one of his pockets and snapped it in the officer's face. If the cartridge had exploded—but it did not.

Nick Carter took possession of the *Howrah* at once, and by his direction, the name *Nadja* was painted on the stern in place of the old one.

The two beautiful horses were shipped aboard, and it is well to say right here that they arrived in New York in the pink of condition.

Carruthers died of blood poisoning before the *Alert* was two days out on her return voyage, and it was thus that he paid the penalty for his many crimes.

Both yachts reached New York in safety.

And now one word concerning the real rajah.

He was executed by the law for the murders he had committed, and, strangely enough, he died on the very day that Nick had named to the koohnar of Matarapur as the one when he would become the rajah and the possessor of all his cousin's immense wealth.

THE END.

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